

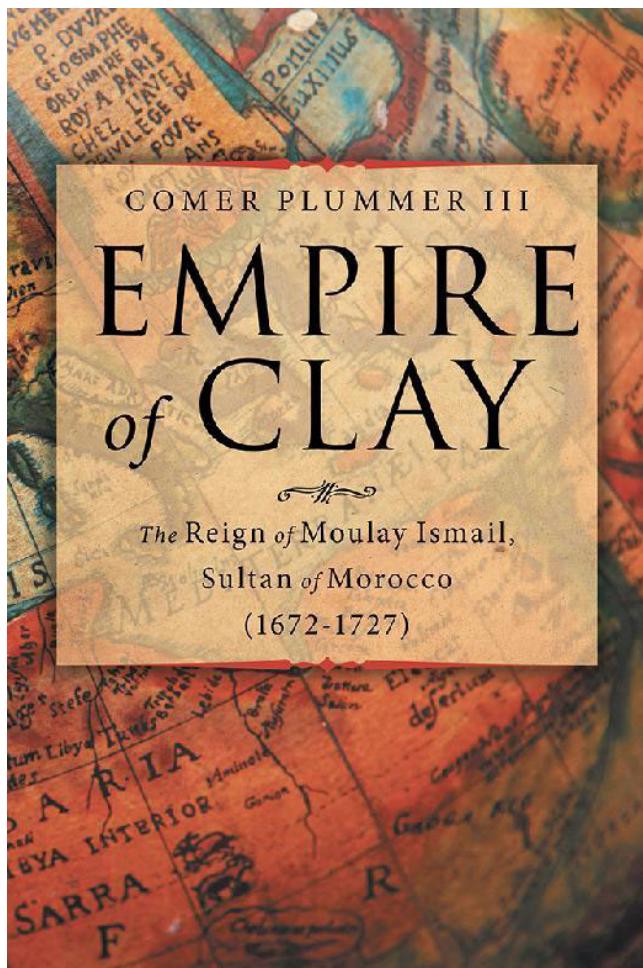
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COMER PLUMMER III

EMPIRE *of* CLAY

*The Reign of Moulay Ismail,
Sultan of Morocco
(1672-1727)*





EMPIRE

of

CLAY



The Reign of Moulay Ismail,

Sultan of Morocco

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COMER PLUMMER III

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ISBN: 978-1-6847-1260-1 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-6847-1259-5 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019917290

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Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 12/10/2019

For Faris

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PREFACE

In the West, the political history of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has come to be called the Age of Absolutism, a period when monarchs had unfettered themselves from the constraints of the Middle Ages and acquired wealth and power for themselves as never before during the Common Era. This “absolutism” is something of a misnomer, since no ruler is entirely free of constraints. Even the despot was bound by certain considerations, such as custom, finances, and the obligations of patronage. That said, certain monarchs of this period stand out for their ability to establish a distinctly personal rule. The poster titan of this time was Louis XIV of France, the so-called Sun King, whose grandiosity was embodied in an expression attributed to him: *L'état, c'est moi!* (I am the state!).

Among these absolute rulers was the Moroccan sultan Moulay Ismail, second in the Alaouite line that continues to rule that country today. Moulay Ismail sat upon the throne for fifty-five years, surpassing the other eighty-four men (omitting the pretenders and interlude periods between dynasties) who have ruled the kingdom since the coming of Islam in the eighth century. In part because of its long duration, Moulay Ismail’s reign was consequential: he completed the process of national reunification begun by his brother, built a glorious new capital at Meknes, and chased Spain and England from a number of enclaves along the Moroccan coast. Through exceptional vigor and the force of his personality, Moulay Ismail accumulated more power than any king or emperor of his day, at least on the domestic scene. Today, outside of Morocco, his name tends to come up only when the record for human progeny is discussed, for Ismail’s output, if the reports are to be believed, was truly epic.

The man was not always so easily overlooked. In his time, Moulay Ismail was familiar to many capitals in Western Europe, thanks mainly to the corsairs of the Moroccan coastal city of Salé. Their operations, specifically the taking of hostages, provided the main impetus behind the firsthand

records of Moulay Ismail and his kingdom. Since the Moroccan sultan established a monopoly on people captured by corsairs operating from his territory, people seeking to redeem these unfortunates had to deal with the government, and often the ruler himself. Over the years, Western visitors to Ismail's court—diplomats, merchants serving as intermediaries, and clerics—recorded their observations, and several of these accounts were subsequently published in Europe. Additionally, a number of hostages wrote of their experiences upon returning from their years in bondage. These accounts complement the later histories of Moroccan scholars.

In taking on the subject of Moulay Ismail, one is confronted with a divergence of Western and Moroccan scholarly interpretations of the man. Historians agree that Moulay Ismail possessed an indomitable spirit and remarkable vitality that lasted well into his dotage. Almost certainly, no other Moroccan sultan spent more time in the saddle. For the better part of three decades, he was almost constantly on campaign, leading his troops in battle and sharing, more or less, their hardships, as we see during the nearly disastrous winter crossing of the High Atlas Mountains. In terms of personal habits, Ismail was austere, with a lively mind for philosophic discussions, a fascination with architecture, and a love for animals and horses in particular.

The source of controversy is Moulay Ismail's darker side. Western historians tend to base their assessments on the aforementioned firsthand accounts, so they consider the man to have been a monster. According to this view, Moulay Ismail's sins were many. He was a miser who acted as though the wealth of the land belonged to him alone. Consequently, Ismail was ever on watch for those officials around him or governors of the provinces who were on the take. He was suspicious to the point of paranoia; the governing elite were always under scrutiny and lived on edge. Above all, Moulay Ismail understood and exploited the power of fear. He reduced everyone around him to pliable creatures, demanding the sort of groveling that might have made a Mandarin blush. Mercurial in temperament and capriciously vicious, Moulay Ismail's power employed the random violence characteristic of terror systems of government. The man's presence was electric; when he was in evil spirits, an aura of paralysis spread to all within

his reach. To Western eyes, it was at once fascinating and horrifying, the epitome of oriental barbarism.

It makes for entertaining reading, but at times the narratives seem a bit surreal, even contrived. By way of example, we may cite John Windus, who was part of an English diplomatic mission to Meknes in 1721, and to whom we owe many of the most horrific anecdotes of Moulay Ismail. In one passage, Windus wrote, “With the death of Moulay Hamet [actually Ahmad Ben Mahrez, Moulay Ismail’s nephew], the Cruelty of this Emperor began to appear; the first Scene of which was acted by the side of a River, to which he came with his Army, but could not pass, whereupon he ordered all the Prisoners to be killed, and woven into a Bridge with Rushes, for his army to pass upon.”¹

Among Western writers, such over-the-top characterizations of the Moulay Ismail were legion. Louis de Chénier, a French diplomat assigned to Morocco from 1767 to 1782 and author of *Recherches historiques sur les Maures et Histoire de l’empire du Maroc*, may have best summed up Western sentiment when he wrote the following of Ismail: “Active, enterprising, and politic, this emperor tarnished the glory of his reign by avarice, duplicity, oppression, injustice, and catalogue of cruelties, the relation of which would be dreadful, and the remembrance of which only time can efface. Nero, Caligula, and Heliogabalus were abhorrent villains; yet they themselves were unequal to the fiend of whose acts I give but a partial account.”²

The modern reader will not fail to remark other aspects of Moulay Ismail’s remorseless consumption of humanity: the pitiful fate of the Christian captives, the forced enrollment of black and mixed-race people of his kingdom into his army and household, the thousands of young girls sacrificed for the ruler’s sexual gratification, and the abject neglect by a father of his hundreds of sons and daughters. All but the smallest fraction of these children shared the fates of their mothers. When Ismail tired of a concubine, he dispatched her and their children to a desert exile. None of this made him evil by the standards of the time, but on the whole, they complete the picture of—at the very least—a sociopath.

Moroccan historians have taken softer approaches. Younes Nekrouf dismisses these allegations entirely, insisting they are “ridiculous and do not merit refutation.”³ Others gloss over the worst of the excesses or avoid the inhumanity altogether. In his chronicle of the Alaouite Dynasty, Issa Babana Al Alaoui merely concedes that Moulay Ismail was “not exempt from imperfections.”⁴ Some historians rationalize, arguing that such random conduct was typical of rulers of the age and that reports of Moulay Ismail’s excesses were doubtless the subject of exaggeration. Brahim Boutaleb wrote, “One must determine as a sign of the greatness of Moulay Ismail the fact that legend took hold of him, and that certain aspects of his personality had in time disproportionately grown.”⁵

There are elements of truth here. Certainly, the more harrowing the narrative of Barbary life and captivity, the better for charitable giving and marketing of publications on these topics to a Christian audience. On at least one occasion, material published in an earlier account was lifted to enliven a later one, as we find with *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow*, which includes content published previously by John Windus. Another serious issue with these accounts is that they were not written with an eye to attribution. These authors rarely differentiated between firsthand observation, information received from reliable sources, and hearsay, so the reader must make a leap of faith in accepting their veracity. Even Saint-Olon’s famous remark about the sultan appearing before him bloodied from having just killed two of his slaves is compromised: that he saw blood we may accept, but Saint-Olon adds that he “was advised” of the executions.⁶ By whom, we do not know.

These matters considered, we can neither accept Western accounts of Moulay Ismail and his kingdom as unvarnished truth, as Christian propaganda, nor as commercial literature. We also cannot overlook the fact that Moulay Ismail was not the only Moroccan monarch to have Western observers write about his court, and no other ruler received such dire reviews. Who then was the real Moulay Ismail?

Such a question was the reason for this book. As with my earlier chronicles, *Roads to Ruin: The War for Morocco in the Sixteenth Century* and *Conquistadors of the Red City: The Moroccan Conquest of the Songhay*

Empire, I sought to achieve a degree of parity between the Western and Moroccan viewpoints. I also endeavored to place Morocco in the broader geopolitical context, including that kingdom's relations with Europe, the Ottomans, and West Africa. Specifically, I examine Morocco's relevance to the France of Louis XIV and the exiled James II of England, which has been much written about in the past and generally misrepresented.

A few brief words on structure. When I refer to Western firsthand accounts, I reference the collective publications of Windus, Pellow, Saint-Olon, and other eyewitnesses of Moulay Ismail's reign, as well as that of John Braithwaite, who visited Morocco in the months after Ismail's death. These twelve documents are enumerated in the first endnote to the epilogue. I included summarized versions of several of these accounts as chapters, rather than sprinkling key anecdotes throughout my book as most authors of histories of Moulay Ismail have done. By adopting this approach, rather than using these excerpts to support my conclusions, I encourage the reader to independently access the merits of their observations.

The challenges in writing this book were familiar. There were more European sources than I had encountered in my previous projects, but on the Moroccan side few primary sources have survived. In this category, the best material available was often recorded long afterward and relied upon either documents since lost or oral history. Such works include those of the nineteenth-century historians Abd al-Qasim bin Ahmad al-Zayyânî (*Le Maroc de 1631–1812*) and Aḥmad ibn Hālid al-Nāṣirī al-Salāwī (*Chronique de la dynastie alaouite au Maroc*). There were also the usual barriers to understanding—legends, taboos, and so on.

When deconflicting differing accounts and information from various sources, I inclined to rest on the prevailing view of historians and chroniclers or, when there was none, on the oldest or the most respected sources. Often I used my own analysis. The explanation for each instance may be found in the endnotes.

For the spelling of Arabic terminology, I relied primarily on the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. The translations from Arabic into French are the works of others; those from French to English are my own, as are any errors or omissions within the pages of this book.

Ultimately, the truth is a matter of interpretation.

White Plains

July 4, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any project of this nature is inherently collaborative, and I am most grateful to those who gave life to this vision. First, my thanks to Kamal Lakhdar for his unfailing support in research assistance and translations. His unique talents and insight added tremendous value to this book. I wish to thank Fouad Chrabi and Mostafa Benfaida for their assistance in my research on the history of Meknes. I also wish to recognize the outstanding resources of the Library of Congress of the United States and Gallica, the digital archive of the National Library of France. Finally, I thank my family for their patience and support in seeing this project through.

PART 1

ANOTHER BEGINNING

Figure 1: Muslim dynasties of Morocco

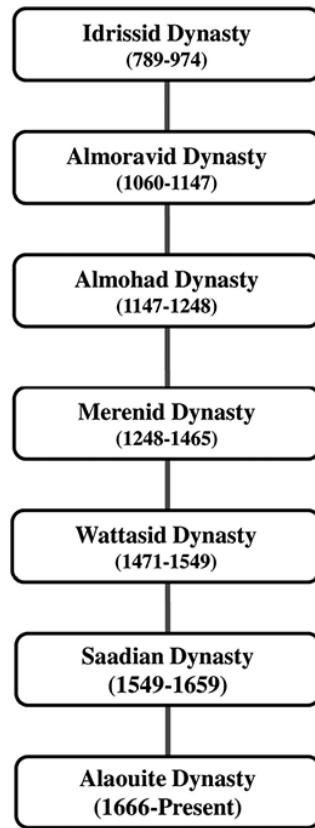


Figure 2: Morocco in the seventeenth century

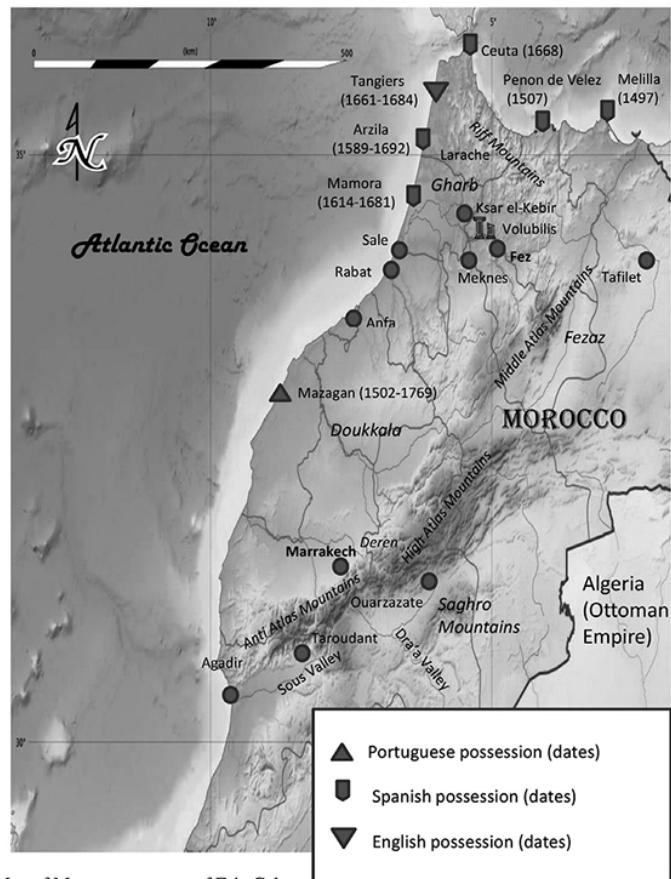


Figure 3: Moulay Ismail



unknown artist
(Memorial du Maroc, V4:45)

Figure 4: Expansion of Meknes under Moulay Ismail

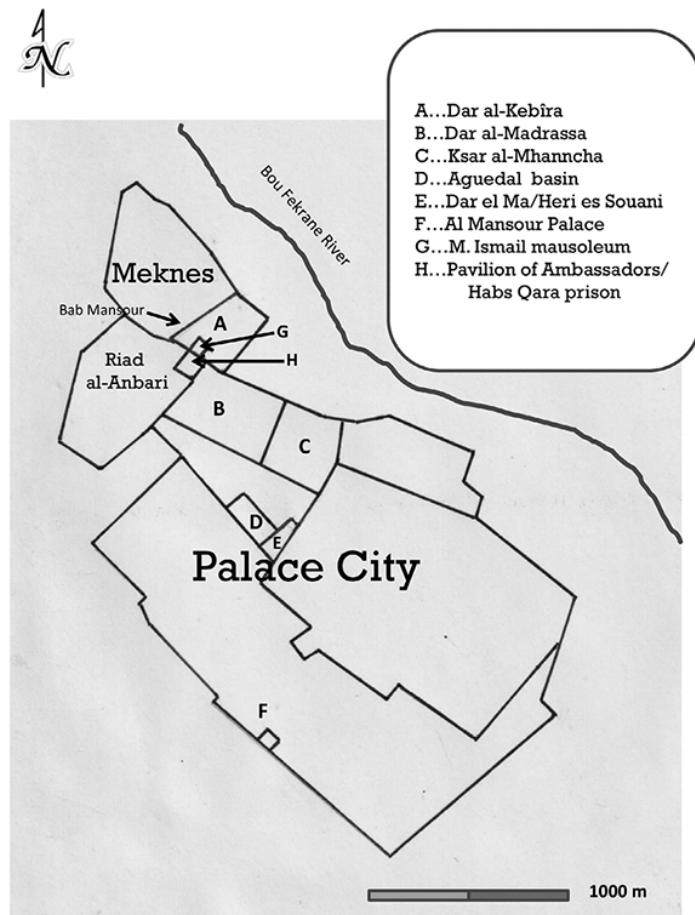
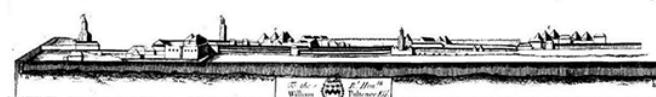


Figure 5: Meknes



Meknes by John Windus
(Windus, 184)



Bab Mansour gate
(author photo)



Aguedal basin
(author photo)

Figure 6: Meknes



Top: Well in the Dar el Ma

(author photo)

Left: Dar el Ma granary

(author photo)

Right: Heri es Souani granary

(author photo)

Figure 7: Meknes



Top: Pavilion of the Ambassadors
showing air vents to the Habs Qara
(author photo)



Right: Habs Qara prison
(author photo)

Figure 8: Horseman of the Abid al-Bukhari



(Memorial du Maroc, V4:50)

1

THE FAILED STATE

The first lesson of civilization is that of obedience.

—John Stuart Mill¹

A failed state is commonly defined as a political body that has disintegrated to the point where basic responsibilities of a sovereign government no longer function properly. This means, among other things, that the central government ceases to control its borders, provide security for its people, manage its finances, and furnish basic public services. As a result, the government loses its legitimacy, domestically and internationally. The nation drifts, rudderless and impotent, while the people suffer a host of economic and physical deprivations.

Today, Africa is home to a disproportionate number of failed states, but Morocco is not among them. In the geographic context, the Moroccan state is strong with a diverse economy, and its people share a healthy sense of national identity; however this is a recent phenomenon. Since the country's first Islamic government in the eighth century, Morocco has experienced the ebbs and flows of empire and collapse. Before the current ruling family, the Alaouties, took power in 1666, the land had experienced five ruling dynasties—four had reigned for about a century, though the Merenids lasted for two.² The declines of these great houses and the periods between them were characterized by chaos and vast human suffering.

The volatility of the early Moroccan state is a complex subject that begins with geography. Morocco is segmented by the Riffan and Atlas (Anti-Atlas, Middle Atlas, and High Atlas) mountain ranges, which form a crescent with its open end facing west and several distinct subregions. Inside the crescent, the west—particularly the northwest—consists of fertile plains; the area east of the crescent is semidesert; the mountain regions are often barren and offer few passes between these regions. Like all political entities built over such geography, the challenges to developing a homogenous society have been considerable. Simply put, this kind of terrain favors clannishness and tribalism.

And so it was with Morocco. The Berbers, the indigenous people of the Maghrebian region of modern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, were the majority ethnic group. In their highland redoubts, where they had fled to avoid succeeding invading armies of Romans, Byzantines, Visigoths, and Arabs, they were more than the backdrop of power politics in the region. Notoriously clannish, truculent, and prone to vendettas, they were a kaleidoscope of wild nations that would not countenance servitude to their nominal conquerors.

They were often partners with their overlords, to be sure. For instance, Berber nomads converted to Islam fairly quickly, and Berber tribal contingents became important auxiliaries to Arab armies, notably in the invasion of Iberia in 711. Indeed, the commander of that Muslim army, Tariq ibn Ziyad, was himself a Berber. And in the centuries that followed, Arab and Berber forces fought side by side to advance the conquest of the peninsula and then to arrest the Christian reconquest.

But the relationship was complicated, and shared religion could not assuage the many frictions. As far as many Berbers were concerned, Arabs were outsiders and land grabbers. Arab migrations across North Africa and into Morocco, notably by the Hilalien and Maqil Arabs, led to the retreat of Berber tribes farther into arid mountain regions, touching off intertribal skirmishing for scarce arable land, pasturage, and water. Furthermore, the two sides did not blend well, coming from different cultures and speaking different languages. The Berbers, sedentary and insular, dominated the mountains and deserts from their ksour (singular, ksar) or earthen fortresses.

Their nature was to resist the authority of the state, first and foremost by evading the ruler's taxes. The Arabs were pastoralists and city dwellers who prevailed on the plains and in the urban centers. Arab arrogance was an added irritant with the indigenous folk. The Arab attitude as God's chosen people, their resultant prerogatives, and their treatment of the Berbers as second-class citizens inspired a deep resentment among the Berbers and resulted in their gradual political marginalization. The fact that such unfolded while the Berbers dominated Morocco—four consecutive Berber dynasties ruled the land for five centuries—was ironic. After the Almohads (1147–1248), Moroccan rulers ignored their indigenous origins and emphasized their Arabian connections, which further exacerbated the Berbers' umbrage and sense of inferiority.³ The troubled marriage of these two ethnic groups within the Moroccan state became known as the Arab Problem.

Added to the Berber-Arab question were differing outlooks across the geographic spectrum—country versus city and the various subregions, such as the Sous, Riff, Middle Atlas, and deep south. One of the most important of these was the north-south divide. The area of northern Morocco, fertile land proximate to the Mediterranean Sea, was influenced by the Arab states of the Levant and North Africa. Culturally and emotionally, these peoples felt connected to the great cities of Quaraouiyine, Cairo, and Baghdad. Fez, the first Islamic city of the kingdom, was the hub of this region and occasionally served as the capital of the kingdom. Regardless of where the sultan resided, however, Fez was the nation's Islamic polestar. It hosted the oldest university, the highest concentration of learned scholars, and the principal religious leaders of the land. With some justification, the Fassis, as the people of Fez were called, considered themselves a superior sort, better educated, and more refined than their compatriots. In contrast, the south was arid and remote, and it looked not east but south. It was a land of more diverse stock, including mixed-race Moroccans, Tuaregs, and black Africans. This region was focused on trans-Saharan commerce that revolved around the city of Marrakech. Like Fez, the so-called Red City (for the pinkish tint of its earthen construction) had served as the capital of the kingdom, most recently under the Saadian Dynasty (1549–1659). Over the centuries, these two cities and the people they represented became rivals for supremacy over the realm.

In addition to the ethnic and regional divides, religious devolution contributed to the problem of national unity. Seventeenth-century Morocco was still in the midst of what became known as the Maraboutic Crisis. This protracted contest between the central government and the rural communities had grown out of the emergence centuries earlier of rural holy men, referred to as “marabouts,” as figures of local authority.⁴ The marabouts were Sufi mystics who claimed baraka, a divine favor and power that its possessor might use or bestow or that a follower might absorb even after the possessor’s death.

Rural Morocco was fertile ground for Sufism. Simple people were drawn to Sufi asceticism, including its quest for a more direct relationship with Allah and the distinct rituals (*tariqa*) of brotherhood. The brotherhoods, or *zawaya* (singular, *zawiya*), were centered on lodges, centers of learning and devotion that were usually near the tombs of saints. For the common person, being in a *zawaya* meant proximity to baraka, which was otherwise the preserve of the Islamic elite, the *ulama* of madrassa-trained scholars and jurists, and the comparatively small class of bluebloods, the descendants of the Prophet, the *shurafa* (singular, *sharif*).

However, the *zawaya* were about more than the esoteric. As the primary mediators between tribes and ethnic groups, they served as the essential arbiters in a consensus-based society. They also provided important services, such as lodging and guides for traders and travelers and charitable and social services.⁵ For these reasons, the *zawaya* became an indispensable part of the national fabric, particularly after the life of Morocco’s greatest Sufi master, Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Jazuli (died 1465), the author of the famous collection of prayers titled *Dala’il al-Khayrat*. After his death, the Jazuliyya Sufi Order found a preeminent place among the brotherhoods of the Aissawa, Jilala, Nasiriyya, and others. “He who has no shaykh, has [Shaitan] for a shaykh” was a common saying, indicating the extent to which the Sufi shaykhs commanded the passions of the country people.⁶

Naturally, with such a prevailing attitude, and in a land where decentralized power was the norm, the Sufi shaykhs were drawn into local politics; the more ambitious among them needed little encouragement. In the remote countryside, the shaykh’s influence eclipsed that of the sultan. Strong rulers

could often mitigate their influence through a combination of salesmanship, incentives, and threats, but sometimes military action was required to keep them in line. During intervals of imperial weakness, the Sufi shaykhs were less compliant and might incite their congregants to resist tyranny, typically taxation. The more charismatic might invoke jihad against the infidel and/or restoring the purity of Islam. In any case, the shaykhs could mobilize considerable military support from the Berber tribes of their regions. They were power brokers, rivals to be courted, and in the most extreme cases, regional warlords of autonomous fiefdoms.⁷

Thus the countryside, with its profusion of Berber tribes, parochial interests, and zawaia, constituted a serious and enduring challenge to governing in Morocco, as exemplified by later dynasties. The Merenids (1248-1465), lacking sharifan (also chorfa, meaning blood relation to the Prophet) origins, had no moral authority over the countryside. As their military prowess waned, they were unable to arrest the steady bleed of their power to the zawaia. Added to this difficulty was an increasing number of Portuguese and Spanish incursions and conquests of important ports and coastal areas, a presence that proved economically debilitating and sapped the legitimacy of the ruling house. In their debility, the Merenids were overthrown by the Wattasid family, which was even less able to confront the growing chaos. The Wattasids were in turn ousted by a family of Arab origins, the Saadians, who claimed sharifan pedigree and harnessed the zeal of the Maraboutic Crisis and jihad to carry themselves to power.

Despite having every advantage, the Saadians also failed to establish themselves. The dynasty unified the country, drove the Portuguese from several coastal enclaves, and later crushed them at the Battle of Ksar el-Kébir (1578). They created a vast state-controlled sugar enterprise and then used that enormous wealth to raise a substantial standing army with modern weaponry and tactics. They captured key nodes of the West African caravan networks, even crossing the Sahara and conquering the Songhay Kingdom to establish a trans-Saharan empire. And yet, for all their divine credentials and achievements, the Saadians lasted just over a century. They too were unable to surmount the contradictions of the Moroccan state.⁸

After the death of the last great Saadian ruler, Moulay Ahmad al-Mansur (1578–1603), a crisis of succession ushered in the prolonged demise of the dynasty. In the decade that followed, the country was embroiled in a civil war between his three sons. When at last the dust settled in 1613, two rump Saadian states emerged—a southern kingdom seated in Marrakech, ruled by al-Mansur’s surviving son, Moulay Zaydan, and a northern kingdom at Fez, ruled by another branch of the family. Lacking in resources, these states were helpless to prevent the countryside from slipping away to the control of long-oppressed zawaia and opportunists.

The first of the freebooters was a religious scholar from Tafilet, Ahmad Abou Mahallî. This Sufi master decried the Saadian decadence and the return of the infidel Spaniards to Larache and Arzila. He declared himself the Mahdi (the redeemer of Islam) and rallied a few hundred fighters, sufficient at the time to drive Moulay Zaydan from Marrakech. But his reign was as short as his means, and in 1613 Abou Mahallî was killed in battle by Zaydan’s zawiya allies, the al-Hais, of the High Atlas. Though Moulay Zaydan was restored to power, he would be firmly tethered to his sponsors for the remainder of his rule.

Shortly after Abou Mahallî’s demise, a new fiefdom appeared at the mouth of the Bou Regreg River, on Morocco’s northern Atlantic Coast. Here settled thousands of Muslim Andalusians who had been driven out of Spain in one of the last mass expulsions between 1609 and 1614. They funneled down from Tétouan, where they learned something of the pirate trade, to the ancient settlement of Salé (the former Roman city of Sala) on the north bank of the Bou Regreg embouchure. Here, and across the river at the Kasbah of the Udayas (present Rabat), they set up shop as sea raiders. These “Moriscos” determined to carry their revenge against Christendom to the high seas. Their ornery nature was also reflected in their attitude toward Moroccans. These immigrants held no particular feeling for their new land, since it neither helped them against Spain nor welcomed them to its bosom. They would administrate themselves through a governor elected annually and a divan, or council of elders. This experiment in self-government would be known to history as the Republic of the Bou Regreg or the Corsair Republic.⁹

It did not take long for the Salétins to make their presence known. Whatever fishing vessel or leaky tub they started with, they soon had a growing collection of captured ships, and there were always plenty of unemployed young men to crew them. In 1617, a Dutch captain wrote, “A year ago, the Moors of Salé did not have so much as a ship, now they have forty at seas; they will become very powerful, if we don’t watch out.” He was prescient. The corsairs grew more audacious as they expanded the scope of their operations from the Gulf of Cadiz out into the North Atlantic. By 1622 they were sailing the English Channel, and in 1631 a corsair flotilla attacked the Irish coast. Four years later, another convoy raided Plymouth and took two hundred captives. While much of Morocco was suffering the privations of political tumult, the Salétins were feasting on New World and Mediterranean shipping. According to one source, between 1620 and 1630, the corsairs of Salé captured a thousand vessels from various nations.¹⁰

Meanwhile southern Morocco began to drift away. Predictably, the troubles began in the notoriously restive Sous Valley, a peculiar and troublesome bit of terrain that had bedeviled more than one dynasty. An alluvial basin of the eponymous river between the western extension of the High Atlas and the Anti-Atlas mountain ranges, the Sous Valley was singular in its fertility. The steady supply of mountain streams that fed the river made it the home of the Moroccan sugarcane industry, for a time the principal source of wealth of the land. Competition for land and water resources was more acute here than elsewhere in the kingdom, both between the tribes themselves and between the tribes and the crown. The Sous also featured the port of Agadir, the terminus of the trans-Saharan caravan network that ran from Tamegrout through Marrakech. Finally, the traffic of European firearms through this port ensured that the tribes were armed to the teeth. Jealousy, money, and weapons—it all added up to a hypercharged atmosphere.

In the early seventeenth century, Abou al-Hassoun al Semlâlî and his Iligh zawiya managed to harness these forces and carve out a fiefdom in the Sous. His calling card was as a mystic and holy warrior, but al-Hassoun was also an eminently practical man who took full advantage of his geographic advantages. By 1659, the year the Saadians finally expired, Abou Hassoun

had established trade relations with several foreign states including Britain and Holland. Revenue from imports and exports, the caravans, mines, and more made Abou Hassoun one of the wealthiest men in the land.¹¹

Warlords popped up in every corner. In the extreme north was Khadir Ghaïlan; Shaykh Aras ruled the central Riff Mountains from Tétouan; the Arab chief Abd al-Krim held a large swath of terrain between the High Atlas and the Oum Er-Rbia River; and in Tafilalet (Sijilmassa) far off to the east was an Arab tribe, the Alaouites, who were expanding their control over the oases and arid desert plains of the frontier. One of the more flamboyant war chiefs was Sidi al-Ayachi. Like Abou Mahallî, el-Ayachi was an opportunist who capitalized on popular discontent with the foreign presence on Morocco's coast, most notably the Spanish enclaves of Larache, Arzila, and Mamora, to mobilize support for jihad. He spent much of his subsequent career menacing the Spaniards, attacking their outposts and ambushing their patrols, without ever really mounting a serious challenge to them.

The most powerful of these regional potentates was Mohammad al-Hajj and his Dilâ zawiya. This Jazuliyya brotherhood was founded in 1556 by the mystic Abou Bakr ben Mohammad al-Dilâ'î (1537–1612) in Dilâ, near present-day Khenifra. For its first decades, this order of Sanhaja Berbers of the Mejjet tribe maintained a low profile as it built and expanded its base of support among the Berbers of the Middle Atlas. The brotherhood's exemplary code of hospitality and charity won many followers and wide respect, in addition to tremendous wealth in the form of charitable contributions. They were also educators, and it was said that the brotherhood's library contained ten thousand books and their madrassas four thousand students. To be sure, it was not Fez with its world-famous Al Quaraouiyine University, but it was impressive enough when one considers the rough environment of the mountain people. Beyond its considerable moral authority, the Dilâ had the advantage of proximity to the Tadla Plain, which controlled the Fez-Marrakech axis and several important passes through the Atlas. They also had in their midst a number of large, prosperous Berber tribes from which to draw military support when needed.

The Saadians recognized the potential challenge of the Dilâ to their authority. Only a year after the brotherhood was founded, the Saadian sultan Mohammad ash-Shaykh, never a fan of granting favors, exempted the Dilâ from public service and taxes. Succeeding sultans were no less cordial, but they monitored the Dilâ warily. In return, the Dilâites kept to their ministry and charitable works and steered clear of politics. But in the years after al-Mansur's death, with the collapse of the state and mounting chaos, the Dilâ gradually extended their influence over the Berber tribes of the Middle Atlas. In 1637, when al-Hajj assumed the leadership of the brotherhood, he allowed the Dilâites to be drawn into a dispute between el-Ayachi and the Saadian ruler in Marrakech over control of New Salé (present Rabat). The following year the Dilâ forces defeated an invading Saadian army, and a few years later they turned on el-Ayachi, who was subsequently assassinated. By the time the Saadians exited the scene in 1659, the Dilâ controlled much of central Morocco, from Fez and Taza in the east to New Salé and Azzemour in the west. Abstract in their politics, zealous in fighting and in religious work, the Dilâ had the aura of what would later be considered a revolutionary movement. They certainly intimidated northern Morocco; even the ulama of Fez were cowed into silence before the great Dilâ imam. As Moroccans looked out over their fractured political landscape at mid-century, the Dilâ looked like the safe bet to succeed the Saadians as the next dynasty.¹²

One thing was certain: no matter who won the awful contest for power, reviving the national fortunes was going to be a hard task. The national economy was in ruins, and the entire West African region was reeling from decades of commercial contraction. For centuries the region's prosperity had revolved around salt, gold, and sugar. Saharan Berbers mined slabs of salt, which were sent south and exchanged for West African gold dust. The metal was sent north to Morocco, where some of it was exchanged for European manufactured goods. Most of these imports probably remained in Morocco, but many products such as cloth, silk, cooking implements, glass, and iron tools found their way via the caravans to the Senegal and Niger river valleys. The West African gold also served a secondary purpose in the Moroccan economy. Since Western merchants gladly accepted as an exchange commodity Moroccan sugar, which that kingdom produced in

abundance, the Moroccan government was able to retain a fair amount of the gold to monetize the economy.

Everyone profited, particularly Morocco, being the intermediary between Europe and Western sub-Saharan Africa. During Ahmad al-Mansur's time, some foreign observers living in the country judged it to be one of the richest of the Mediterranean world. Moroccan regimes recognized the criticality of sugar, and for once, they advanced a domestic commercial enterprise. During the last half of the sixteenth century, the government had expanded the sugarcane industry from the Sous Valley into the Tensift River system; massive investments were made in building broiling houses, water canals, and aqueducts. Although no records were kept, at the time Morocco was probably Europe's primary source for processed sugar.

By 1650, all that was a distant memory. Years of civil war between al-Mansur's sons destroyed the sugar industry, and the country no longer even exported the product. The West Indies had supplanted it—permanently. The caravans still came, but with lesser frequency and fewer goods. The Moroccan military expeditions to the Saharan salt mines and the oases of central Algeria and their subsequent conquest of the Niger Bend (the arch in the Niger River centered on Timbuktu) had dislocated traditional trade networks, and merchants were moving in other directions, namely to the south and the Gold Coast. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Morocco was receiving only one caravan every three years. Gold became so rare that in 1631, a Moroccan ruler prohibited its export.¹³ Local industry also suffered. Brigands operated with impunity, securing bribes or plunder from traveling merchants. In many areas, traders ceased to travel outside of their immediate cities or villages. Money fell into scarcity, and urban life declined. In the country, nomadism made a comeback, and the herd—sheep and goats primarily—became the leading source of wealth in the land.

The decline of the state had direct repercussions on the health of the people. The land was already all too prone to the caprices of nature, such as irregular rainfall, the chergui or hot winds of the Sahara, and locust and grasshopper invasions. In addition to the obvious duty of the state to provide security, which made all economic activity possible, its most important social service was to stockpile grain to mitigate the effect of bad

harvests and natural disasters. When the state failed to fulfill its responsibilities, the population was exposed to violence, privation, and hunger. Malnutrition led to sickness and the proliferation of disease. As the great Islamic thinker, Abd ar-Rahman Ibn Khaldûn, observed:

In the latter years of dynasties, famine and pestilences become numerous. As concerns famine, the reason is that most people during this time refrain from cultivating the soil. Because, in the latter years of dynasties, there occur attacks on property and tax revenue and, through customs duties, on trading. Or, trouble occurs as the result of the unrest of the subjects and the great number encouraged to rebel by the senility of the dynasty. Therefore, as a rule, little grain is stored. If nothing is stored, people must expect famines.¹⁴

Morocco's history is replete with periods of famine and disease. The period described in these pages saw seven significant events, including hunger and contagion that killed an estimated 10 percent of the population during 1557–1558; another epidemic in 1597–1598; and a plague and famine in 1602–1603 that carried off Ahmad al-Mansur among tens of thousands of others.¹⁵ Between 1603 and 1610, during the civil war between al-Mansur's sons, two terrible periods of drought and widespread sickness ravaged the land. Urban areas, with their high concentrations of people, were hardest hit, and the two great cities Fez and Marrakech were decimated. As an example of the desperation that gripped the inhabitants of Fez, according to a Jewish chronicler in that city, between 1603 and 1606, eight hundred residents of the Jewish quarter of that city died of hunger and another six hundred apostatized to avail themselves of public charity.¹⁶ Marrakech was in even worse shape, being subject to these adversities as well as several violent changes of hands between rival armies. In a letter to the Estates General of the Netherlands in September 1607, a Dutch observer in Marrakech wrote despairingly,

In a space of fourteen months, we have seen six kings in this city, so that all has been ravaged by soldiers from within and without; all paths are infested by war and a lack of security ... There is no chance for peace since five princes are contesting the kingdom with incredible temerity ... The ordinary people die of hunger ... All is ruined, all has perished in the misery of this time and it is impossible to relate to You High Lords that which I have seen and how I have lived here.¹⁷

The bubonic plague, cholera, smallpox, and typhoid were the big killers, and the peaks of their ravages continue to follow the fortunes of the harvest. Additional periods of famine and epidemic occurred in 1625–1631 and 1661–1663. Although the overall human toll cannot be estimated with any degree of confidence, one fact should suffice to indicate the scope of the tragedy. In the early sixteenth century, Leo Africanus—diplomat, traveler, and author of the celebrated book *Description of Africa*—estimated the kingdom's population at about six million people. In 1914, the French colonial administration conducted a more accurate assessment that placed the population at approximately five million.¹⁸ Clearly the state had failed its people.

The country was also broken on the international level. The inroads the Saadians had made in ending Morocco's isolation fell apart. The land was already outside the Ottoman economic zone, and it shared little by way of trade with the Turks and their North Africa provinces. The Saadians did little to change that dynamic, and their militarism in the Sahara and the Sahel exacerbated the kingdom's seclusion in Africa. The failure of al-Mansur's policy was fully apparent in 1618 when the so called Pashalik of Timbuktu, the Moroccan colony along the banks of the Niger River, effectively broke away and became independent. Relationships with Europe were no better. Overtures to France and England for free trade agreements came to naught, not that such was have mattered, since without sugar or gold, Morocco had little with which to barter for European goods. Several European nations maintained consuls in Morocco, primarily in Salé and Tétouan, to look after their interests, but as the seventeenth century unfolded, their activities involved less assisting their merchants doing

business with the Moors, and more aiding religious orders in the ransoming of their countrymen captured by the corsairs.

To the Mediterranean world of the mid-seventeenth century, Morocco was all but irrelevant. For the seafaring nations of Spain, Portugal, and England, it was little more than a way station for their globetrotting mariners. That same justification had been employed back in 1415 when Portugal conquered Ceuta and became the first European nation to acquire a base in Africa since the Byzantines. Whereas that outpost had been originally intended to support the exploration of the African coast, two centuries later it was about exploiting new horizons, such as the West Indies, Brazil, and New Spain.

The Saadian decline helped generate a renewed, if distinctly limited, European interest in the Moroccan coast, which had once been of vital importance for the Iberian powers. In 1525, they had occupied twelve forts and trading posts between Agadir and Melilla. During the Saadian period that number was whittled down to four, but by 1650 it had rebounded to six. The oldest of the outposts was Mazagan (present El Jadida), occupied by the Portuguese since 1502. Spain, which already held the enclaves of Ceuta (Whose inhabitants voted to unite with Spain when the Iberian Union had ended following the Portuguese war of restoration.¹⁹) and Melilla—as well as three small islands off the coast, including Peñón de Vélez—occupied Larache in 1610 and four years later took Mamora, near present-day Kenitra. The English received Tangier from Portugal in 1661 as part of Charles II's dowry for the hand of the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. The English, who did not yet have Gibraltar, were fairly giddy with the strategic possibilities of their newest acquisition. They developed plans to reinforce the city defenses and improve the harbor by building an extensive breakwater.

The English were optimists, and new to the North African experience. Other than the local warlord Khadir Ghailan, there was no one to oppose them. Had they considered the Iberian experience in Morocco, they might have appreciated that such would not last. Morocco had been broken before, but it always managed to recover.

2

RISE OF THE ALAOUITES

The Berber tribes in the West are innumerable. All of them are Bedouins and members of groups and families. Whenever one tribe is destroyed, another one takes its place and is as refractory and rebellious as the former one had been. Therefore, it has taken the Arabs a long time to establish their dynasty in the lands of Ifriqiya and the Maghreb.

—Ibn Khaldūn¹

Morocco, 1631–1677

Morocco's emergence from collapse in the mid-seventeenth century had a familiar ring to it: the tribes rallied around an Arab clan of impeccable religious credentials, and that coalition, led by a hard driving warlord, defeated several regional leaders on its way to power. So it had been in the preceding century for the Saadians, who had led a jihad-turned-rebellion that toppled the ineffectual Wattasid sultanate. In the seventeenth century, Berber tribes again went in search of an Arab clan of chorfa from eastern Morocco. The Alaouites, with their proximity to the tribes concerned, were the obvious choice.

The Alaouite shurafa traced their origins to Hassan, one of two sons of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.² They had migrated from Arabia to eastern Morocco in the thirteenth century, and eventually the locals had persuaded

them to settle in Tafilet. As legend has it, the people of the region were worried about drought and their declining harvest of dates, and they thought the Alaouites' baraka might improve their fortunes.³

Whether the date production of Tafilet improved is not known, and neither is any Alaouite contribution to the next three hundred years of Moroccan history. They appear to have been just another element in the kaleidoscope of Moroccan tribes, albeit with a higher pedigree. Presumably they served the Merenids. Did they rally to try to hold the last Moroccan possessions in al-Andalus? Perhaps they joined the campaigns in present-day Algeria against the Kingdom of Tlemcen. Their role under the Saadians is equally unclear, though it is safe to assume that they kept a low profile since their claim of being chorfa made them potential political rivals of the ruling dynasty.

It was only during the long Saadian decadence that the Alaouites began to emerge from obscurity. In 1631, when the Ihigh and Dilâ zawaya began to encroach into Tafilet, the people of the region recognized that sooner or later they would be a battleground for control of this important caravan terminus. Alarmed, they turned to the Alaouites for protection. For their champion, they chose the chief of the clan, the fifty-two-year-old Moulay Sharif.

A younger and more dynamic man might have been a better choice, but Moulay Sharif was at least politically astute enough to placate his neighbors and maneuver clear of a conflict. He had no real military support; his best weapon with his religious lineage, which he used to the fullest. When necessary, he played the Ihigh and Dilâ against each other. It was an anxious time, and after a few trying years, the aging sharif abdicated in favor of the eldest of his fifteen sons, Moulay Mohammad.

The new leader was determined to pursue more than mere survival. Moulay Mohammad sought a fiefdom in oases of eastern Morocco, and he enlisted the help of local Maqil Arab tribes. For a time, he and his patchwork army raided western Algeria, penetrating as far as Tlemcen before retiring beyond the Moulouya River, the traditional frontier between Morocco and the Ottoman province of Algeria. It was a savvy move, since raiding and the prospect of plunder was the time-honored way to swell one's military ranks.

But it could only go on for so long before the Turks got serious about affairs along the border. In time, Moulay Mohammad was obliged to back down and agree to a treaty with Algiers.

Religious credentials would only get the Alaouites so far, for they were the weakling in a rough neighborhood. In 1637, an official loyal to Abou al-Hassoun, acting on the Sufi shaykh's orders, abducted the retired Moulay Sharif and spirited him off to captivity in the Sous. Moulay Mohammad raged against the Iligh, posturing as a regional potentate and holy warrior, but he dared not openly antagonize the powers that surrounded him, the Iligh and Dilâ zawaya and the Turks of Algeria. In the end, he swallowed his pride and paid a hefty ransom to free his father.⁴

Coexistence, appeasement, playing one rival against another—so it went for almost twenty years. In 1662, a crack in the ring that surrounded the Alaouites finally appeared when the Dilâ shaykh Mohammad al-Hajj died. The Dilâites would henceforth suffer from lackluster leadership, and their power would begin to wane. This became apparent when the notables of Fez rejected the Dilâ and the city became independent, providing an opening for an aspiring sultan. Moulay Mohammad tried to capitalize on this opportunity, but his effort to capture the city failed. With that check, the sharif's baraka had taken one hit too many. In 1663 a rival emerged, one of Moulay Mohammad's younger half-brothers, Moulay Rachid.⁵

Other than his being born around 1631 in Tafilet, little is recorded of Moulay Rachid's early life. His story begins in 1659, when at the age of twenty-eight, he fled into the Atlas Mountains. That year, Rashid's father and former shaykh of Tafilet, Moulay Sharif, had finally given up the ghost. After his passing, the tribal leaders were summoned to reaffirm the bay'ah, or oath of allegiance to Moulay Mohammad. There was apparently enough dissension, however, to cause Moulay Rachid to take flight in order to save himself from fratricide.

Moulay Rachid was a dynamic and charismatic leader, quite a contrast to the plodding Moulay Mohammad. In a few short years, he secured the support of important Maqil Arab and Berber Beni Snassen tribes of northeastern Morocco and formed a fiefdom at Taza. This city, which occupies a strategic corridor between the Riff and north section of the

Middle Atlas Mountains, was a highly defensible piece of ground, and it had been well fortified over the years. In 1664, with his base of support secure, Rachid advanced from Taza and defeated his brother in battle near Oujda. Moulay Mohammad was one of the few casualties, killed apparently by one of the first shots fired that day.

After a short pause to gather more tribal support and military supplies, in 1666 the sharif of Tafilet unleashed his campaign to reunify the country. Fez fell on the second try, and then Moulay Rachid dealt with the warlords one by one. First he drove Khadir Ghaïlan to Arzila and ultimately into foreign exile, and next Tétouan was brought to heel. In 1668, Moulay Rachid went for the weakened Dilâ's jugular, driving his army to their eponymous village and original lodge in the Middle Atlas. Defeating the Diliâte forces, he razed their ribat and drove their leaders into exile in Algeria. The following year, the advance continued south to the former capital of Marrakech, where the Chebânet had ruled since the death of the last Saadian ruler in 1659. Moulay Rachid stormed into the city and executed their chief and all of the captured ruling family. His coup de grâce was a drive west to the Sous Valley and the fief of the Iligh. Like the Dilâ, this zawiya had also lost its generalissimo; Abou al-Hassoun had died in 1660, and the leadership had passed to his son. The once-formidable Iligh was demoralized and offered faint resistance. Taroudant, the principal city of the region, fell in October 1671. After two more battles, the following month Rachid's forces captured the Ilir fortress and put an end to the Iligh. By the end of 1671, Moulay Rachid had unified the principal regions of the country.⁶

Moulay Rachid returned to Fez determined to reconcile that historically troublesome nest of clerics and bluebloods to his rule. The sultan built the Cherratine Madrassa; he improved the fortifications, repairing ramparts and adding the Cheraga Kasbah, and he tried to stimulate economic activity in the city. Rachid was also active outside Fez, building bridges and the Udayas Kasbah at New Salé (present Rabat). He sought to restore security in the countryside and encourage the resumption of commerce between cities and towns. To that end, he appointed several trusted family members and aides as regional governors. One of these was a half-brother, Moulay

Ismail, who had backed him against Moulay Mohammad. For that support, Ismail was installed at Fez as governor of the north.⁷

After a few months spent securing his position in the north, Moulay Rachid set out for Marrakech, where he planned to attend Aïd el-Kebir, the Feast of the Sacrifice. On April 9, the second day of the festivities, the sultan took his horse for a ride through the Aguedal Garden, a magnificent, four-hundred-hectare allotment near the royal palace. Horse and rider gained speed as they weaved through rows of pomegranate and fig trees. As they rounded a group of orange trees and passed under a low branch, Rachid failed to duck in time. His skull caved in by the blow, he tumbled from the saddle, mortally wounded. He was forty-two years old.⁸

Ismail was not the first in line for succession, which fell to the next-oldest brother, Moulay al-Harran. But the story goes that Joseph Maïmoran, an influential Jew of Meknes, where Moulay Ismail had relocated a year earlier, upon receipt of the news of Moulay Rachid's death, advised Ismail to make for Fez posthaste to seize the city and its wealth. Moulay Ismail acted upon this advice.⁹ On April 16, he cajoled the ulama into declaring him sultan of Morocco.¹⁰

Not everyone in the kingdom embraced its new leader. When no deputation arrived from Marrakech to offer fealty, Ismail sent emissaries to find out why. They returned with the news that the city had declared for his young nephew, Ahmad ben Mahrez, son of Moulay Sharif's third male offspring, the late Moulay Mahrez.

Ismail hastened to suppress this challenge, and he marched out of Fez at the head of a makeshift army to bring Marrakech to heel. Ben Mahrez, who had raised the Sous tribes in revolt, attempted to intervene. Reaching Marrakech at the end of May, Moulay Ismail met the rebel army before the walls of the city and set them to flight. Ben Mahrez and most of his followers retreated into the mountains and made their escape. Ismail would later rue that he had not made a greater effort to kill or capture his nephew. For the next thirteen years, Ahmad ben Mahrez would be a thorn in his side; however, at that moment the new sultan was content to be magnanimous in victory. He occupied the city and secured the submission of its people, without the

reprisals and looting that would later be customary. The only thing he carried off with him on this occasion was his brother's body, which he dispatched to Fez for reinternment.¹¹

No sooner had calm been restored in Marrakech than Fez rose in revolt, so Moulay Ismail reassembled his army and marched out of Meknes. The Fassis closed the city gates, and both sides settled in for a siege. After a few weeks, the leaders of Fez appealed to Ben Mahrez for assistance and he accepted, moving his forces into the Taza area. Meanwhile two more troublemakers appeared on the scene: the spurned Moulay al-Harran skulked back home to have himself declared king of Tafilet, and Khadir Ghaïlan, the erstwhile strongman of the Riff, returned from exile in Algeria to a hero's welcome in Tétouan.

Moulay Ismail dealt with these problems as his brother would have—systematically. He decamped from Fez and marched on Taza, where he bottled up Ben Mahrez and his loyalists. After a few weeks, the rebels slipped away under cover of darkness and scurried toward the desert. Ismail then marched west into the Riff Mountains to deal with Ghaïlan, tracking down and killing the troublesome warlord in August 1673. The following month he was back at Fez, which finally capitulated on October 28, 1673, after a rebellion of fourteen months and eight days. As he had been at Marrakech, the sultan was forgiving, but his patience was wearing thin.

Moulay Ismail was twenty-six years old when he became sultan. Of average height and medium build, he had rather fine features—long face, small eyes, aquiline nose, and thin chin beneath the ubiquitous black beard—and his complexion was that of a mulatto. What he lacked physically, however, Ismail made up for with energy and a commanding presence. He was also an excellent horseman and spent much of his time on horseback, lance ever in hand.

Just as with his half-brother Moulay Rachid, we know little about Ismail's life before he ascended the throne. He was born around 1646 in Tafilet to Mubarka bint Yark al-Maghfiri, a black or mulatto concubine of the Mghafra tribe.¹² Moulay Ismail grew up as many Middle Eastern notables did, in the intensely competitive, estrogen-charged politics of the harem, where the great man's wives and concubines were ever jostling for his favor

and the interests of their male progeny. And there were plenty of women and children involved, roughly fifty wives and concubines and more than 160 children.

One may wonder about the effect of such a household on the children. Specifically, how did Ismail develop the cravings and impulses that he would display during his reign? Growing up, he could have had no expectations of being a great man, let alone ruler of the country. He had eighty-two brothers and half-brothers, and it was not until Ismail's twentieth year that Moulay Rachid set the family on a trajectory to ultimate political power. But somehow the young Ismail formed big appetites, though not for his table, which was always austere. His passions were three—women, horses, and building—and as a ruler, his life would be devoted to these pursuits.

There was something else, though—something sinister that influenced his character during those formative years. We can only speculate about this, but what is clear—assuming the Western firsthand accounts of his rule are accurate—is that Moulay Ismail understood the paralyzing effect of fear. There must have been some harrowing aspect to his upbringing. As one writer reflected, “Ismail, from a tender age, was acquainted with the bloody brawls with his innumerable brothers, more than one of whom might become—for each mother promoted their sons—a competitor in the contest for the throne. At the same time, he was presented view of child victims of vengeful slaves [and] the fears of novice executioners dreading reprisals. Such spectacles, such sentiments influenced his conduct during his long existence.”¹³

Moulay Ismail started indulging his passions early, probably in his teens. We may assume it started with horses and that soon after came the women, of whom one of his earliest acquisitions was a woman of West Sudanese extraction, Lalla Aïsha Moubarka. Ismail liked variety in both of his stables; when it came to women, he had a preference for the exotic, blacks, Europeans, and Georgians. Aïsha had been the property of Moulay Rachid, but somehow she attracted the attention of the young Ismail, who purchased her for the princely sum of sixty ducats. Although she was later recorded to have been obese and generally repugnant, at this point she must have had

sufficient charm to pry open the purse of the notoriously parsimonious Ismail. In fact, she was appealing enough to become one of his four wives. Aïsha would become known among European chroniclers as Sultana Zaydana, which was as much a reflection of her imperious nature and influence over the sultan as it was her parentage of the heir, Moulay Zaydan.¹⁴

Building, Ismail's third passion, had to wait for his ascension to power. While we can only speculate as to the veracity of Ismail's purported treasure trove of horses and women, the evidence of his passion for construction is very much evident in Meknes today. In 55 years, ending only with his death, Moulay Ismail transformed the sleepy town of Meknes into a major metropolis, the capital of an empire, and the most heavily fortified city in Morocco.

It was a break with tradition, the making of this new capital. Since the time of Morocco's first Islamic dynasty, the Idrisids, the kingdom had known only two capitals, Fez and Marrakech. Ismail chose Meknes, it was said, because as governor of the city, he had come to appreciate its clean air and fresh water. He also wanted to distance himself from the urban elites of both Fez and Marrakech. Meknes, on the fertile Saïs Plain of northern Morocco, on the south bank of the Bou Fekrane River, was indeed on prime agriculture land, and it enjoyed proximity to the abundance of the Middle Atlas, rivers, cedar forests, and natural springs. Otherwise it was nondescript, a typical medieval city with its crenelated towers, six-meter-high ramparts, and a fortress—all courtesy of the Merenids, who had recognized the strategic importance of the settlement and improved upon the original Almohad fort. Despite the higher profile, during Ismail's tenure as governor, Mekness was a backwater of a few thousand inhabitants.¹⁵ For the builder with grand designs, however, this blank canvas was an advantage.

Before he could start to work, Moulay Ismail required labor, and lots of it. To that end, he requisitioned all the slave labor of Fez and had them packed them off to Meknes. Henceforth, he would own all Christian captives through a royal monopoly. The sultan mandated that the corsairs sell their captives only to his agents, which rankled greatly since the corsairs' profits

were maximized through bidding; furthermore, the royal cheapskate could be depended upon to lowball them. Additionally, the sultan started a corvée, according to which monthly quotas of laborers and mules were levied upon the tribes, and artisans were requisitioned from various urban centers. Immediately, work began in earnest on the construction of the new capital city.

The first stage in the transformation of Meknes work was clearing space for the grand design. The houses that had appeared over the centuries like barnacles around the kasbah and the eastern part of the old medina were knocked down to make room for new construction. Not only were these unfortunate residents not compensated in any way for their loss, but they were even forced to move the debris to collection points where the stone and other usable material would be repurposed for future use.

Barely had that demolition been completed and the rubble moved out when Ismail's attention was drawn back to internal security matters. Certain Arab tribes of the Angâd plains, far to the east near Oujda, were marauding to an extent the sultan could no longer ignore. Furthermore, in 1674 Ben Mahrez popped up in the south, appearing at Marrakech and—incredibly—persuading the city leaders to join him again. The sultan's men scurried north to inform their master, in what could not have been a pleasant interview. So the sultan once more roused his tribal allies and set out for an extended campaign. This time, he told himself, lessons would be learned.

The campaign got off to a promising start. Moulay Ismail swooped onto the Angâd and scattered the Arab miscreants. Then heading south, he was fortunate to find his nephew waiting to do open battle near Tadla. At Bou Aqba, on the El-Abid River, Moulay Ismail once more routed Ben Mahrez, who fell back to Marrakech. The sultan, perhaps overconfident, anticipated a quick resolution, but his initial attacks on Marrakech failed. The year 1675 ended with both sides settling in for a siege.

It was during this time that Moulay Ismail began to show his fangs. When he uncovered treasonous activity by several of his commanders, the sultan not only had them strangled, but also sent word back to Fez ordering the murder of their families. Then, when Marrakech finally capitulated in May 1677, after a siege of nearly two years, there were harsh reprisals. The city

was subject to widespread looting; the sultan's executioner lopped off the heads of seven of the ringleaders, and another thirty rebels had their eyes burned out. Ben Mahrez was not among the sultan's victims, however, since he and his diehards made their getaway just before the city's defenses collapsed.¹⁶

Elsewhere, the news was less inspiring for the young ruler. Sanhaja Berbers of the Middle Atlas and the Berber tribes of the Sous and the Dra'a valleys were in open revolt. On three occasions, expeditions Ismail sent to smite the former were badly defeated. Although Ismail's forces eventually recaptured Tafilet, al-Harran had escaped. Ismail feared that his brother might join with Ben Mahrez, who was making mischief in the Sous. The Salétins were discontented with the sultan's meddling in their business and their measly profits. No tribe was happy with the corvée to construct what was viewed as a superfluous capital, since the kingdom already had two. For the people of the north, the capital was Fez, and for the southern tribes it was Marrakech, so Meknes meant nothing to them. It seemed that the entire country was either simmering or already up in arms.

The Sanhaja problem was serious, because if they spilled out of the mountains and onto the Tadla plain, they would effectively cut communications between Fez and Marrakech. Moulay Ismail could no longer delegate this mission to subordinates, nor would he treat it as a police action for a few thousand troops. Breaking off his operations against Ben Mahrez in the Sous, he concentrated his forces and moved north. Invading the Middle Atlas near present Khenifra, he pursued the enemy cavalry into the cedar forests, killing some three thousand and taking seven hundred heads with him back to Meknes. During this campaign, Moulay al-Harran rode into the imperial camp at Tadla and threw himself on his brother's mercy. According to the Moroccan historian Ahmad ibn Khalid al-Nāṣirī, the sultan took pity on his brother and pardoned him, though no doubt demanding his allegiance as a prerequisite.¹⁷ Al-Harran was dispatched to a nameless desert oasis. By the end of 1677, the acute troubles had subsided.

These were five exasperating years, and they probably made a dark impression on the temperament of the mercurial sharif. This period of crisis

management also led Moulay Ismail to adopt the most controversial and far-reaching policy of his long reign. The decision came at during the early months as he scurried between hot spots and endured the maddening intervals in between. Ismail was chronically frustrated: enraged by his soldiers' lack of fighting spirit, peeved by the return of troublemakers to an area as soon as he had departed, vexed in needing to negotiate military support from mercenary clans, disgusted by tribal unit desertions, and fed up with the manifold petitions of local chiefs against his unruly troops. It was abundantly clear that mastering his domain and maintaining his sanity would require a change of strategy—and a new, more dependable army to implement it.

3

THE BLACK GUARD

One must have an army to wage war, not wage war to raise an army.

—Moulay Ismail¹

The reliability of the Moroccan army was an old problem faced by many of the kingdom's rulers. The system that had evolved over the centuries made political authority reliant upon clientelism, according to which the sultan provided select tribes and zawaia certain favors, typically tax exemptions and other economic concessions, in exchange for their military support. Although an expedient means of raising an army, these jayish (also referred to as guish) military units also posed a number of risks for the sultan. They were poorly trained, inexperienced in modern techniques of war, and notoriously undisciplined, and their looting and atrocities against noncombatants inflamed tensions between the government and local populations. Finally, their loyalties ultimately lay with their tribes and brotherhoods, and they would change sides when it suited them or simply abandon a campaign in order to bring in the harvest.

Some dynasties had tried to alleviate this dependency through military reform, most notably the Saadians a century earlier. Their answer had been to cobble together a regular force from various elements of society, primarily Moroccans of Andalusian origin. They also relied heavily on renegades (Christian converts to Islam) and foreign mercenaries, including Europeans and Turks. Although they continued to employ jayish units, this

was more to round out the army in times of national crisis, and these units were generally allocated to the reserve.

The Saadians also tried to build a military that could stand toe to toe with their powerful foreign enemies, foremost the Ottoman Turks. Through their province in Algeria, the Turks had meddled in Moroccans affairs for many years by trying, directly and indirectly, to draw this last piece of North Africa into their orbit. The Saadian sultans also had to contend with the lingering threat posed by Spain and Portugal, both of which had enclaves along the kingdom's coast. So there was a strong impulse to modernization. Beyond the creation of a regular army, the Saadian formed infantry units and expanded the use of gunpowder weapons, namely the shoulder-fired arquebus (the predecessor of the musket) and artillery.

All of this was enormously expensive. Fortunately for the Saadians, their advent came at a time when Moroccan sugar was in high demand in Europe —before the industry effectively relocated to the West Indies. For many decades, processed sugar was the leading export commodity, and its taxes permitted the sultans to grow and maintain a military that allowed them to defeat the Portuguese invasion of 1578 and to deter the Turks until they lost interest in Morocco. Unfortunately, these reform efforts were widely considered to be foreign impositions, so they failed to gain traction. When the Saadians imploded, the experiment died with them and the old jayish tradition and equestrian hit-and-run tactics returned as the bread and butter of the Moroccan army.

Moulay Ismail, no military reformer, would not attempt to revive the Saadian program. Besides, by his time the picture had changed dramatically, and the kingdom no longer faced an existential threat from abroad. The economy had contracted significantly; the sugar revenue stream was dry and the caravans were nearly moribund. So there was little money for a regular army, let alone a modern one.

For months after assuming the throne, Moulay Ismail pondered his options. He was inspired during his visit to Marrakech in late 1673, after his capture of the city from rebels. The details are a bit murky, but it appears that two officials, Mohammad ben al-'Ayyashi and Abu-Hafs Omar ben Qasim al-Murrekushi, also known as 'Alilish, planted the idea in their master's head

that black Moroccans would be the best option for the core of his new army. 'Alilish presented Ismail with an old ledger that his father, a former official in the local government, had prepared during al-Mansur's time, showing the names of all the black men incorporated into the Sharifan army. These were slaves taken from the Niger River Valley during the Moroccan campaign and occupation of that area (1591–1618). Told that this community still existed in the region, Ismail decided to recruit from among them for his new army. For this affair, he appointed al-'Ayyashi as the supreme judge and legal adviser, and he charged 'Alilish with the operational command.²

Why did Ismail settle on the black population? His letter to the religious leaders of the al-Azhar Mosque, discussed below, provides some insight. First, the sultan considered black Moroccans to be generally free of the tribal loyalties that made the Berbers and Arabs so problematic. They were also less addicted to the Sufi brotherhoods—another challenge to the sultan's authority. Finally, Moulay Ismail seems to have preferred their character, which he saw as simple and undemanding. He was not the kind of man who, as the expression went, would take a mile if you gave an inch. In other words, he was the antithesis of the Berber and the Arab. The fact that Moulay Ismail was himself half black was no issue; like all Muslim men, Ismail associated his lineage and ethnicity with that of his father and considered himself an Arab.

The use of black African troops was an old practice in Morocco, dating back to the eleventh century when an Almoravid sultan first formed an imperial bodyguard unit of black Africans. By the next century, the Almohads had expanded the use of West African troops to as many as thirty thousand. Later, the Saadians also used thousands of West African soldiers, including mixed-race troops from the Dra'a Valley, Wolofs from Senegal, and later slaves from the Niger Bend.

The initiative began innocuously enough as a recruitment drive for volunteers from a specific group of black Moroccans, but it ended as one of the great abuses of power of its age. Ismail's recruitment grew incrementally from an effort to recruit paid volunteers to a dragnet to ensnare the entire nonwhite population of the kingdom. Although the initial drive in Marrakech and its environs netted five thousand takers, a

respectable number, Ismail had apparently expected many more, or perhaps he was dissatisfied with the riffraff who drifted in off the streets in search of a reliable meal. Perhaps someone told him that the city purse could not pay for more than the five thousand already recruited. Whatever the reason, the frustrated sultan ordered the forced enrollment of all nonwhite Moroccans in and around Marrakech, including mixed-race Moroccans of West Sudanese and Arab/Berber extraction known as haratin. It was an incredible order, but then he went even further. He commanded that female slaves be acquired for unmarried black soldiers and that any slaves in another's possession were to be purchased for the price of ten mitqals each. Characteristically, Ismail himself would pay not a dinar; the funds were to come from local taxes.³

The targeted population was outraged. Surely this edict could not stand! A Muslim prince could not enslave brothers and sisters of Islam! Why, these people were Moors from all walks of life: freedmen who had been formally manumitted; soldiers, domestics, and sugarcane workers formerly owned by the state but who had drifted into freedom following the Saadian Dynasty; people who had never been enslaved and had lived for generations in Morocco. They were sharecroppers, street vendors, small-business owners, pastoralists, artisans, and more. And of those who remained in bondage, many were prized domestic servants who were thoroughly integrated into the families they served. They were all part of the fabric of the nation. It was madness!

There was a degree of resistance from the owners, particularly in Marrakech, and many grumbled about the paltry sum. Freedmen and free men alike appealed to the court, but almost no one had the written genealogical proof required to avoid impressment. Besides, with al-'Ayyashi on the bench, their fate was predetermined. Slowly but inexorably, 'Alilish and his press gangs rooted out and rounded up the blacks from the city and then the surrounding villages. The tribes were less troubled, since they relied less on slaves than the urbanites, and they needed to cooperate to avoid provoking the sultan's ire. 'Alilish continued his work into the fall of 1674, and by the time he was finished, he had shipped three thousand slaves to Meknes.

The sultan was pleased with this result, but it was only a start; he aimed to replicate it through the land. The next phase was the Gharb, the coastal lowland province of northwestern Morocco, where he sent an agent to round up blacks and haratin. Edicts went out to the major cities of the kingdom instructing the governors to requisition all slaves, for which owners would be compensated for the same ten mitqals per head.⁴

Opposition to this impressment program was widespread, particularly in the early years of Ismail's rule when he was weakest. Governors did not appreciate the added tax burden, nor did they much like surrendering their slaves to the sultan. Other slave owners were likewise inconvenienced, and not just those of the upper strata of society—the shaykhs, clerics, and caïds (government officials and military commanders)—but also merchants, farmers, smiths, bakers, sea captains, and more. Most of the resistance was passive, though not so with the ulama of Fez. From the outset, many of these clerics and scholars decried the sultan's program as being against the precepts of Islam. These holy men supported a strict interpretation of the Qur'an on the subject of slavery, according to which a Muslim or Muslim convert, regardless of race, could not be enslaved by another Muslim.

Moulay Ismail knew, however, that the question of who was enslavable was hardly clear-cut. In theory, Islam was a faith of justice and equality among believers; in practice, like most religions, Islam was born with its ethnocentric traits, and it would absorb and be shaped by the ethnic and racial prejudices of its conquered domains.

Within a short time of the Prophet's death, as Muslim armies were surging forth from Arabia and conquering new lands, Islam had found itself in a quandary over the question of slavery. The Qur'an was opaque about the lawfulness of slavery before God. Jurists asked themselves if it was permitted and, if so, under what circumstances. Eventually a consensus emerged in Islamic schools of thought, including the Maliki, which predominated in North Africa: Muslims were prohibited from enslaving one another, but non-Muslims could be captured, purchased, or gifted. As the years went by, however, custom and economics blurred the lines, and Muslims began to enslave other Muslims based on religious deviation or heathenism.

Islam, therefore, was not fated to be the egalitarian community of believers that its messenger had intended. From the outset, it was dominated by the caste of Arabs who were its wellspring and who held themselves above the rest as God's chosen people. And Islam's outlook was further skewed by the world it came to dominate. In Morocco, for example, Islam had to condescend to the views of the ancient population, the Berbers, who looked down on the other primordial group from the south, the haratin.

Rather than ending the practice of slavery within its expanding borders, Islam simply adapted to it. The Qur'an came to be interpreted in ways that met the needs of the day and justified preexisting attitudes and practices. Being a literate society, the jurists felt the need for some sort of rationalization for the institution, so this dogma was frequently adopted from traditional sources. One of the more prevalent of these views, taken from the Hebrew Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament, was of the Hamitic curse.

The story of Ham, a son of biblical patriarch Noah who disgraced his father, is at face value rather banal. The son's transgression was looking upon his father's naked form as he lay in his tent sleeping off a bout of drunkenness, though some interpretations include Ham mocking his father or even sodomizing him. Noah's other sons, Shem and Japheth, arrived on the scene and covered their father, thus serving as examples of filial virtue. The only striking element about the tale is Noah's reaction. The original curmudgeon, said to be more than five hundred years old at the time, determined to punish Ham's son Canaan, who was forever cursed to be, in Noah's words, a "servant of servants ... unto his brethren."⁵ Although early Jewish and Christian theologians would explain the story as a way to excuse the subjection of the Canaanites to the Israelites, in later times it was used to justify racial bias and form an association between race and enslavability.

Early in the Islamic period, a succession of Muslim scholars—men such as Wahb ibn Munabbih, Ibn Qutayba, and Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī—developed the themes of the Hamitic curse, articulating the evolution of certain peoples according to the sons of Noah. For instance, al-Tabarī maintained that the noble Arabs, Persians, and Greeks had issued from Shem; the mediocre Turks and Slavs were begat by Japheth; and the

Sudanese, whom Allah had turned black and given curly hair, were descended from the wicked Ham. For these “sons of Ham,” God’s curse was manifest in their peculiar appearance and miserable character.⁶

Although some Islamic thinkers, such as Abd ar-Rahman Ibn Khaldûn, disputed the Hamitic curse and attributed black “excitability” to climate, the notion of the inferiority of black Africans and their suitability for slavery went largely unchallenged. Ibn Khaldûn wrote, “The Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because [Negroes] have little that is (essentially) human and possess attributes that are similar to dumb animals.”⁷ The Moroccan scholar Mohammad Ibn Battuta declared himself “astonished at their [black Africans’] feeble intellect and their respect for mean things.”⁸ In Morocco and elsewhere in the Dar al-Islam, the lands of Islam, such views were all too common.

Beyond racial bias, the simple fact that most black people who came to Morocco came as slaves connected race to the institution of slavery, and by the Saadian period that connection was solidly made. As the French consul Louis de Chenier observed during a diplomatic mission to the Alaouite court in the eighteenth century, “The words Negro and slave are synonymous among the Moors.”⁹ In the end, the black African, for many Arab and Berber Moroccans, was simply a southern commodity. “The price of a black is salt,” went the Moorish proverb.¹⁰ And so they were, slaves and salt, two staples of the trans-Saharan trade network. This outlook provided a sufficient dodge around religious dogma to justify slavery and gave Moroccan rulers a rationale for imperialism against their southern neighbors.

That being said, Moulay Ismail’s unprecedented and brutal program was highly controversial. Leading the charge against the sultan’s initiative, the ulama of Fez spoke from the country’s religious epicenter, so they could not be ignored. The sultan made many efforts to persuade them to the necessity—even the legitimacy—of his actions. In a number of letters written to various jurists, including the qadi Sidi Mohammad Ibn Abelkader, he argued that the kingdom’s need for a strong army to unite and defend the land was paramount and outweighed any religious considerations. Moreover, the slave origin of these blacks justified their reenslavement for

service to Islam. In one missive, the sultan wrote to Sidi Mohammad, “No city, in fact no tribe, being so animated with the spirit of the clan, would consent to bear this yoke. The inhabitants of Fez, for example, as you know well, complain constantly of their poor resources to the point that, if we asked them to provide two or three thousand soldiers, they would not consent, pretending to be incapable of doing so.”¹¹

For the most part, Ismail’s arguments fell upon deaf ears with the scholars of Fez. He also tried intimidation, but the ulama refused to endorse his actions, so Moulay Ismail decided to go over their heads. He wrote a letter to the al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, requesting a fatwa, a religious decision, upon the matter. Being in contravention of the sharia, the sultan could not tell the whole truth, and he lied about having his own clerics’ support. He wrote,

Not having found upon our arrival in power an organized and available army on which we could rely and which could inspire confidence and security, we turned to Allah, imploring his help in the choice of convening and building up an effective army. We then realized that the freemen and the inhabitants of the Maghreb at this time would not be suitable for military engagement, and this for multiple reasons. Sloth and laziness were established in their habits, and the force of want as well as greed had become a character trait ... It was then that we shifted our interest to slaves whom we bought from their owners.

We have chosen these slaves to make soldiers and to make up the shield of Islam because these possess distinct traits not found in others, such as that this stock is not very costly, that it is content with little, and that it is very satisfied with whatever is offered to it.¹²

The sultan got his fatwa.

The jurists of the al-Azhar might have decided differently had they known the totality of Moulay Ismail's scheme. Thinking not only of soldiers, the sultan also envisioned gainful employment of women and children. In the self-perpetuating system that evolved, the slave colonies produced offspring, and the state saw to their education and eventual employment, thus providing a source of state labor for the royal household and the economy. When children reached the age of ten, they were taken from their homes and placed into training programs. Girls were sent to royal households to learn domestic skills, and the most talented were trained as musicians and singers. Boys began their education in manual labor, then animal husbandry, and finally, at sixteen, military arts. Two years later, the boys were married off to slave girls and sent to the garrisons, and their children entered the same program—and so the cycle continued.¹³

Initially, the main task was to breed. In 1678, there were roughly fourteen thousand slaves at the main encampment at Machra ar-Remla, near present-day Sidi Yahia.¹⁴ A few thousand of the best soldiers were garrisoned at Meknes. As the program expanded from the Gharb, and then to Doukkala, Tamesna, and other regions of the kingdom, the numbers of “enrolled” began to climb. Machra ar-Remla became a city, and dark faces gradually disappeared from the countryside and the desert oases. Still the search went on, as recorded by John Windus, who visited Meknes in 1721:

For the Year 1698, the Emperor appointed that all Records of the Country be searched, that the Discovery might be made of such as were descended from Slaves and Renegadoes. In this Search were committed many great Cruelties, and many thousands of poor People, either for private or publick [sic.] Piques, or being of duskier Complexion than ordinary, if they could not produce long Scrowls [sic.] of their Genealogies, notwithstanding their having lived free for Ages, and enjoyed comfortable Fortunes, were declared Slaves, and their Estates and Persons seized for Use of the Emperor.¹⁵

By the time the impressment was finally judged to be complete, 221,320 people, or about 4 percent of the population, had been rounded up.¹⁶

As his henchmen were herding the first groups into the gulag, Ismail pondered the practical matter of how to bind these soldier-slaves to his person. As Commander of the Faithful, whatever he came up with had to have a religious quality. Eventually he struck upon the idea of having the soldiers take their oath of fealty to him upon the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the most respected hadith, which was authored by the ninth-century Persian jurisconsult Mohammad al-Bukhari. The black army, he decided, would be called the *Abid al-Bukhari* (slaves of al-Bukhari). It had a ring to it.

Moulay Ismail took stock of this first group of soldier-slaves, among whom the strapping and flinty-looking ones were designated commanders. One day he gathered together his new lieutenants at the palace for the inaugural profession of fealty. On horseback, lance in one hand and the *Sahih* in the other, Ismail glowered at their wooly hair and commanded the knaves to raise their chins. According to al-*Nāṣirī*, Ismail proclaimed, “You and I are now servants of the Sunna [traditions] of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and the law contained in this book [the *Sahih*]. We practice what he prescribed, and we abstain from all he forbade, and upon that we fight. This sacred book”, he thundered, the *Sahih* raised high, “we carry into battle!”¹⁷ It was an electric moment.

Other elements of esprit de corps were forthcoming. The soldier-slaves would have distinctive haircuts, fancy clothes, good weapons—and being the sultan’s men, they would have stature. All this, Ismail knew, would go to their heads. He chuckled at the image of slaves lording it over their former oppressors, the Berbers and the Arabs. Perks were one essential element of the relationship, and fear was the other. Moulay Ismail probably called it discipline, but fear it was: extreme anxiety over punishment that tended to be casual in its application and over the top in its severity. Working together, the carrot and the stick kept the slave servile to his master and all too ready to inflict violence upon others.

John Windus was fascinated by the *Abid al-Bukhari* and their odd relationship to their master. They were not just soldiers, as the Englishman

first surmised, but men Ismail frequently entrusted with important duties at court. The more self-possessed and efficient could become ministers, as he observed:

Several have the Names of Alcaydes [caïds], as the chief of them who wait on the Emperor's Person; others are made Overseer of some Task or Work the Emperor has ordered them to finish; some he makes perpetual Alcaydes over a certain Number of his Companions, as such one is left to answer for the others as to their Diligence, cleanly and good Deportment in all particulars; and it is wonderful to see the Insolence, State and Gravity of these young Rogues and how they ape the old Emperor in their way of Government.¹⁸

But for Windus, the odd part was the way Moulay Ismail treated these men, subjecting them to beatings of “the cruellest manner imaginable.”¹⁹ And, if the Englishman’s and several other Western firsthand accounts are to be believed, he murdered them liberally, often with his own hand.

John Windus’s account of the relationship between the sultan and what historians often refer to as his “Black Guard” reads like an early example of the Stockholm syndrome or the bonding under stressful conditions of captor and captive. But as submissive as they were to the sultan, the Abid al-Bukhari were a terror to “white” Moroccans, and Windus was not the first to make this observation. Years before, Germain Moüette, a hostage of eleven years in Morocco (1670–1681), recorded, “The blacks [in Moulay Ismail’s army] were so proud, because of the Confidence the King places in them, that the Moors quake at their sight, and they treat them as if they were Lords.”²⁰

Not surprisingly, most light-skinned Moroccans despised the Abid. From the Arab jurist in Fez to the Berber shepherd at Tiznit and just about everyone in between, they huffed that these blacks were still chattel, whatever titles they held. As years went by, the Abid became more visible

and the taxes and confiscations to support them grew more onerous, so the resentment deepened.

One writer has suggested that such was intended from the outset. Allan Meyers maintained that Moulay Ismail deliberately employed black and mixed-race Moroccans in his army, knowing that their isolation within Moroccan society, along with their economic dependency on him, would ensure their loyalty and rigorous application of their duties. Myers wrote,

Unlike Mamluks and Janissaries, they [the Abid] were domestic, rather than foreign. Even when they were deployed relatively far from their birthplaces, such as when Saharan soldiers maintained garrisons in the Middle Atlas Mountains, the main difference between them and the people around them was skin color and social status, rather than language, ethnicity, or religion, the kinds of distinctions that characterized other slaves corps. Consequently, M. Ismail took care to isolate his troops and to create hostility between them and those they were expected to control.²¹

Piling insult upon injury, toward the end of the seventeenth century the Abid acquired the right to property. Some of them became quite affluent, at least by Moroccan standards. Just how these men acquired their wealth is not recorded; however, because they were not paid a regular wage, we may surmise that such was the product of extortion, booty collected on campaign, side businesses, and periodic gifts for exceptional service from the sultan. Apparently some of their quarters at Machra ar-Remla became quite ostentatious.

As previously noted, the Abid's initial duty was to go forth and multiply, and multiply they did. In some fifty years, Moulay Ismail's "tawney Nurseries," in Windus's words, churned out offspring, but just how many is difficult to access.²² According to al-Nāṣirī, the Abid grew to 150,000 soldier-slaves toward the end of Ismail's reign, but this is probably an exaggeration. The Spanish captive Joseph de Léon quoted a figure of fifty thousand, including thirty thousand cavalry and twenty thousand foot

soldiers. As he served as imperial armorer in Meknes from 1711 until 1728, his seems a more reliable estimate.

As their numbers grew, so did their duties. The Abid were soldiers, tax collectors, and frontier police; they put down rebellions against the sultan, and they were also the monarch's personal guard. Most significantly, in parceling out the bulk of the Abid in dozens of garrisons and forts that he erected, they became the sultan's eyes and ears in the countryside. Through them, Moulay Ismail was able to speedily react to any disturbance and to maintain control in the hinterlands, particularly in the mountains, where preceding dynasties had only an intermittent presence.

We know little about how the Abid al-Bukhari functioned as a military force—its organization, equipment, training, and tactical employment. The available evidence suggests that Abid were intended primarily to maintain internal order. As such, they were deployed in garrisons of between one hundred and two thousand soldiers, in the so-called bled siba, the lands of disorder, and along key trade routes. They probably played a minor role in attacks against the Christian enclaves and perhaps in Algeria as well. In terms of logistics, the sultan provided their initial kit, which included firearms, ammunition, and horses; once cantoned someplace, the local tribes were charged with their provisioning and with fodder for the horses.²³ The organization of this army reflected a return to pre-Saadian traditions, with light cavalry as the basic component of the army, and specialists, such as artillerymen, sappers, and doctors, recruited from populations of foreign origins—renegades and mercenaries.

Despite its apparent limitations, the Abid al-Bukhari appears to have been effective in the missions assigned by its creator. Ismail's presence at court provides some indication of this. Before 1700, when the corps of the Abid was growing and not yet fully deployed, the sultan was almost continually on campaign; after that year, with the Abid's full commitment and until the end of his rule, Ismail seldom left Meknes.

Unfortunately, Ismail was no student of the history of Praetorians and Mamelukes, nor was he particularly attentive to the disturbances next door in Algeria, where the Turkish sultan's elite janissary troops had launched

several revolts when their perks had been threatened. He failed to consider the long-term political consequences of his project.

Then again, Moulay Ismail probably did not care what followed him. As we shall see, his utter neglect of the succession speaks to this. Ismail might have uttered the same words, albeit in Arabic, that would one day be attributed to Louis XV, the great-grandson of his famous French counterpart, Louis XIV: *après moi le déluge*.²⁴

4

A NEW CAPITAL

If I have a bag full of rats, unless I keep the bag stirring they will eat their way through.

—Moulay Ismail¹

Meknes is one of Morocco's four so-called "imperial" cities, or historical capitals of the kingdom. Today, it is the least visited by outsiders, both foreign and domestic. This forgotten capital is overshadowed by its rivals: Rabat, the present seat of government; Fez, the religious and cultural polestar; and Marrakech with its vast expanse of palm groves and mountain vistas. Meknes is often no more than a pit stop for visitors on their way to nearby attractions, such as the Roman ruins of Volubilis, the tomb of Moulay Idriss in the town by the same name, the vast medina of Fez, or the enchanting mountain city of Ifrane, Morocco's version of Switzerland. Even the king no longer stops in Meknes; he retains an extensive residence in the former Palace City, but as of this writing, the royal palace has been closed for several years.

This was not always so. For a brief time, Meknes owned the spotlight. During Moulay Ismail's reign, the city underwent a complete transformation, from a compact medina and adjoining fort with a population of between six and eight thousand foyers, to a sprawling metropolis that represented a tenfold increase in population and space. The area that Ismail added to Meknes was so vast that today it contains a royal palace, military academy, horticultural institute, track for horse racing, university campus,

golf course, and dense urban neighborhood.² Ismail gave the city six decades of splendor; after which Meknes languished, regaining some notoriety many years later during the Protectorate as France's largest military base overseas. It is no surprise, therefore, that centuries after his death, Moulay Ismail remains the city's benefactor.

Upon assuming the throne, Moulay Ismail took a short time to organize his government before he set his building campaign into motion. The sultan and his master builders devised plans to expand the original kasbah to the east and add a new royal palace, the Dar al-Kebîra. Extensive protective walls, bastions, and vast gates were envisioned. One of the first projects, however, was pens for the thousands of captive workers who had begun to arrive in the city. Several areas were mapped out, including a subterranean prison for the Christians, the most problematic detainees. As groups of French, Spanish, and Italian captives arrived from Fez, Tétouan, and Salé, they were set to work on this task. Simultaneously other crews began by clearing away many old buildings and walls on the east end of the old city. Part of this area was set aside for a grand plaza designed to show off the main entrance to the imperial city, though the less-enthusiastic locals dubbed the place el-Hédime (Ruins Square).

In more than fifty years that followed, much would be built in Meknes, but nothing more striking than the nine monumental gates that pierced the city walls. Even today, these gates are the defining characteristic of Meknes; they are also among the most impressive in the kingdom. With their giant horseshoe arches and flanked by enormous crenelated towers, these Almohad-style gateways were intended to impress. The outstanding example is the Bab Mansour, the “Gate of the Conqueror,” sixteen meters in height and adorned with blind arches, inscribed frieze, and a lattice pattern in relief against a background of green ceramic tiles (this being the distinctive color of Meknes) and mosaics. The two flanking bastions, decorated with the same geometric pattern made of thousands of pieces of raised and indented glazed pottery, featured horseshoe arches supported by Corinthian columns pilfered from Volubilis.³

More than their military value, these gates were symbolic, representing a portal to the grandeur and power of the monarch. Beyond lay the city within

the city, an ever-expanding complex that eventually included three imperial palaces, dozens of smaller ones, numerous pavilions, a warren of harem apartments, twenty-five mosques, ten baths, a vast granary, workshops, storehouses, prisons, an armory, administrative buildings, a stable for thousands of horses, mules, and camels, orchards, an artificial lake, and more. Lots of new walls also went up to shield the gradually expanding Palace City from the outside world. When they were finally completed, the city's ramparts formed a defensive perimeter of three belts of progressively thicker and higher walls, the last being in places about fifteen meters in height, reinforced by seventy-six outposts. If pieced together, the ramparts would stretch for at least twenty-five kilometers.⁴

The sheer volume of the construction was the singular aspect of Moulay Ismail's construction—a Moorish version of Brutalist architecture—albeit with a few fine touches. The sultan's style was a blend of regional influences—the Saharan, which predominated in the arid regions of the south and east beyond the Atlas Mountains, and the Andalusian of northwestern Morocco. In color, content, and simplicity, it was Saharan—brown dried mud brick with sludge overcoat. But this drab base was magnificently trimmed in Andalusian designs for the doors, arches, walls, and floors: zellige mosaic tilework made from individually chiseled geometric tiles set into a plaster base; yeseria, or brilliant white plaster carved into geometric and Islamic-influenced motifs; doors, ceilings, and window coverings of intricately carved cedar woodwork; and the intertwined flowing lines of arabesque everywhere.

One of the better descriptions of the city during Moulay Ismail's time was provided by John Windus in his 1721 chronicle, *Journey to Mequinez*. Provided with a diagram of the Palace City, he wrote the following description:

This Palace is about four Miles in circumference and stands upon even Ground, in form almost square, and no Hill near to overlook it. It is built of a rich Mortar without either Brick or Stone, except for Pillars and Arches, and the Mortar so well wrought, that the Walls are like one piece ... The whole Building is exceedingly massive, and the Walls in every part very

thick, this outward one from 'a' to 'b' [referring to his diagram, Figure 5; 'a' is the left extremity and 'b' is the right extremity] is about a Mile long and twenty-five feet thick.

The Inside of the best part of the Palace consists of divers Oblong squares of a great deal bigger than Lincoln's Inn Fields [the largest public square in London], having Piazzas all round as before described; some of the Squares are checkered throughout the whole space, others have Gardens in the middle that are sunk very deep and planted round with tall Cypress Trees, the tops of which appearing above the Rails, make a beautiful prospect of Palace and Garden intermixed.

There are likewise dispersed throughout the Palace several Buildings which they call Cabahs [kasbahs]; they are built square with plain Walls on the outside, except the front, which consists of Piazzas of five or six Arches; the inside is one very large and lofty Room or Hall, checkered at the bottom, and the sides, almost the height of a man, the Top or Dome curiously painted and richly gilt, the Roof is covered with green Tiles and rises like a Pyramid ... The Nature if the Building is convenient for the hot Climate, being mostly ground Rooms, by reason of which, and the great thickness of the Walls, the Lodgings are very cool and refreshing, when the weather is excessively hot.

Windus found the Andalusian style to his liking:

The Arches were wrought in Plaster Fretwork in Flowers in the Arabian manner, and supported by neat Stone Pillars; the Square [was] exceedingly large and spacious, the walls (for about five foot height) checkered with small Tiles in divers Colors, about two Inches square, of which small Chequer-work there is prodigious quantity in the Palace. All the Apartments,

Walks, Magazines, and Passages and underneath the Arches being checkered, making the Prospect of the Buildings, which are all of great length, beautiful, and neat.⁵

Moulay Ismail built his first palace, the Dar al-Kebîra Palace (the Great House), between 1672 and 1679. The complex consisted of twenty buildings, including six palaces, all rather haphazardly laid out and joined by open or partially covered alleys.⁶ Within its extent were all the necessities of life: kitchens, cookhouses, baths, and prayer rooms, as well as reception halls for state business. Parallel with this construction was the emergence of a separate neighborhood just south of the imperial palace, the Riad al-Anbari. This was the site of the palatial residences of the great men of the makhzen, the sultan's ministers and principal officers. The sultan did not construct this district; he encouraged his men to build there when they came to serve him at court.⁷

Barely had the finishing touches been applied to the Dar al-Kebîra, when Moulay Ismail decided to break ground on a new palace. He was probably driven by a desire to improve upon his initial effort; perhaps it had something to do with his ever-expanding harem and brood and the twelve hundred eunuchs he employed to manage his household. Quarters were getting a bit cramped. So he had the ramparts broken down along the east side of the Dar al-Kebîra and began to expand the Palace City into the fields to the southeast. Here was erected the Dar al-Madrassa, named for a nearby madrasa. In its conception this was intended as a palatial version of a typical Moroccan riad, or home, with its open-air center courtyard.

Southeast of this location, Ismail eventually erected a third palace, the Ksar al-Mhanncha (Labyrinth Palace), which eventually became known as the Dar al-Makhzen. To this day, this palace remains one of Morocco's numerous royal residences.⁸ Encircling the edifice were twenty towers, each with a cupola from which one could survey the city and surrounding countryside.⁹ The enormous garden (seven hundred by four hundred meters) provided the many wives and children a venue for exercise and relaxation; there were numerous apartments organized around small courts,

and other buildings for kitchens, baths, and so forth. With its rows of rooms and elaborate pavilions, it served as a place for official functions and receptions. And, of course, along with the palace came a plethora of other buildings. Ismail would even add a sort of private zoo for his collection of exotic animals, including lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, and ostriches.¹⁰

South of the Dar al-Makhzen, across a broad mechouar, or assembly area, and toward the southern end of the complex, the sultan installed an orchard and an artificial lake. The Aguedal basin was a ten-acre reservoir, measuring 300 meters in length by 148 meters in width and four meters in depth, supplied by a canal system that ran more than twenty kilometers to nearby El Hajeb.¹¹ Here the sultan and his favored wives and children could glide along on a sloop or cool their feet on a hot summer day, but more than a prosaic symbol of opulence for Arab palaces: the basin was also an emergency water source in the event of a siege.

The sultan also took care to stockpile grain—enough, it was said, to feed his city for a year—which he stored on the east side of the basin in enormous granaries. This complex, adjacent to the Aguedal basin, consisted of the Dar el Ma (House of Water), a climate-controlled silo, and an adjoining granary, the Heri es Souani. To maintain a steady temperature for the storage of barley, the walls of the Dar el Ma were built more than twenty feet thick, and the silos were cooled by water from ten wells, each served by donkey-operated waterwheels that scooped water into ducts running along the floor. Adjoining the Dar el Ma to the northeast, the immense Heri es Souani consisted of twenty-two arcades of twelve arches each that held vast stores of wheat and other fodder.

In order to accommodate his collection of horses, Moulay Ismail had a vast imperial stable constructed at the south side of the Palace City, near a bastion called, the Al Mansour Palace.¹² Often the Heri es Souani, due to its appearance (having no climate control features, only partial walls, and absent the ceilings that have collapsed), has been mis-identified for this purpose. The stables have since disappeared, but chroniclers have left us with some details about their construction. The facility was said to accommodate between a thousand and twelve hundred horses (the number varies widely by source) and hundreds of mules and camels.¹³ It consisted

of a wood roof supported by immense mud-brick arches and porticos; each horse had a stall of twenty “epans,” or about fifteen feet in width, and an underground vault held tons of grain to feed these animals. The stables drew water from the same canal that fed the Aguedal basin. In the center of the building was vast storage room for saddles and bridles.¹⁴ Thousands of men worked here, since two men—a Muslim groom and a Christian stable boy—attended each horse.¹⁵

The sultan’s horses had better accommodations than much of the population. Around the Palace City, the old medina, and the Riad al-Anbari, temporary urban quarters popped up to meet the needs of the hour—military encampments, tent camps, and shanty towns for the thousands of court officials, military personnel, traders, money lenders, artisans, diplomats, and hostage negotiators, and more, who were posted or migrated to Meknes. It all completed the picture of a bustling place, the echo of which can be read in Kufic lettering on one of the great city gates, the Bab el Khemis: “I am the fortunate gate which, to my glory, is like the full moon in the sky,” the words proclaim, “I was built by Moulay Ismail. Success and prosperity are engraved on my portals. I am surrounded by good fortune. I am the door to all peoples from West and East.”¹⁶

Many in Meknes might have disagreed with that rosy assessment, for although the capital was booming, it was not a happy place to be. When the sultan tore down their homes, many residents were thrown into the street, reduced to panhandling and living in tents outside the city. Taxes to support the court were high, and people were dragooned into public service projects. The Jews of the city had a particularly onerous task, providing a large monthly allotment of fruit for the distilleries of the Christian captives. And finally, there was the sultan’s presence. When he was away on campaign, which was frequent in the early years, a bit of the old, sleepy Meknes returned, but when the sultan came home, so too did the tension that hung like a dark cloud over the city.

The suspicion that colored Moulay Ismail’s worldview must have created a poisonous atmosphere at court. The sultan had his favorites, to be sure, but his confidence was fickle at best. In general, Western firsthand accounts reflect a ruler who was suspicious of the competence and probity of his

ministers and regional governors, and who was positively paranoid about unseen fingers in the budgetary pot. Moulay Ismail's method of dealing with people was to keep them in a state of uncertainty and dread. If these firsthand accounts of the daily audience, to which we shall return, are at all accurate, imperial officials must have considered it an affair to be survived. One day a minister might earn praise; the next day he could be accused of gross negligence or even thievery. At the very least, the hapless fellow would be subject to public humiliation, and sometimes he lost his property or was beaten, strangled, or beheaded. As John Windus observed, "This was the Treatment of his Grandees: to-day hugged, kissed, and preferred; tomorrow, stripped, robbed and beaten."¹⁷

Such terror was not confined to the court. After concluding with state business in the morning, Moulay Ismail usually spent the next few hours touring the work sites, and the stress that attended his presence was palpable. The overseers and work crew kept a lookout for the crimson parasol. When it was spotted, every trowel fell into unison and the tempo became decidedly urgent, and if they were lucky, the devil would pass on with nary a pause or a comment.

Woe unto those present when Ismail would stop to ask questions or confer with his master builders! Such occasions could drag out, for no detail was too small for his attention. Worse still was when the sultan sometimes lingered at a particular site to take his couscous lunch or to join in the work, laying mortar or setting tile. Invariably, Moulay Ismail found someone slacking off or something done in an unsatisfactory manner; and, he punished the offender on the spot. If the fellow was fortunate, he might receive a blow on the head from the iron butt of the sultan's lance. Sometimes the brute gave a curt signal to his slaves to do the business, but when he was in a particularly foul mood, Ismail often laid into the poor soul with his own hand. If the reports of men such as Windus, Busnot, and Pellow are to be believed, Moulay Ismail's passing through the work sites frequently left a wake of seriously injured, dead, and dying men.¹⁸

Moulay Ismail was an obsessive man, and his desires were never sated. With him, it was always more—more women, more horses, more grandeur for his city. The cost of all this was a concern to many in the makhzen. In

particular, the sultan-architect's mania for building threatened the kingdom's finances and potentially its stability. It was not just the endless adding on, but also constant reworking of completed projects, for the sultan was seldom long satisfied with a job. Palaces, mosques, and other edifices underwent cyclical face-lifts, which made the Palace City seem, in the words of one observer, "like Scenes in a Theater, which change at almost every Act." The French consul in Salé, Jean-Baptiste Estelle, wrote in 1698, "All writers who attempt to describe this palace will give different accounts of it, for every six or seven years it changes completely."¹⁹ If Ismail heard the grumblings, he paid them no heed. When once he offered an explanation for the frenetic activity, it was in typically caustic language. "If I have a bag full of rats," the sultan is said to have remarked, "unless I keep the bag stirring, they will eat their way through."²⁰

The rats to which Moulay Ismail was referring were the thousands of prisoners who labored to achieve his vision. The vast majority were Moroccans, criminals or opponents of the regime, augmented by Europeans and perhaps people of other nations. The number of captives varies widely according to accounts, with a high end of thirty thousand domestic prisoners and twenty-five thousand European captives. Although the number of Moroccan prisoners cannot be estimated with any reliability, Anastese Goudal's 1950s-era study from period records of captive baptisms and graves indicates a lower figure for the Europeans, perhaps about one thousand Christian captives at any one time. This is close to Windus's estimate of eleven hundred Christian captives during his stay at Meknes in 1721; it also corresponds to the capacity of the prison facilities.²¹

Whatever the number, captives were the engine behind the new capital. Moulay Ismail's Meknes was a city of slaves. They build the Palace City, and they formed much of the population: Moroccan prisoners, Christian internees, the Abid al-Bukhari, palace eunuchs, and the concubines of the harem. All told, they must have nearly equaled the number of free people of the city.

This is largely forgotten today, and much of the evidence has been paved over. Two powerful reminders endure, however, just outside the northwest side of the imperial city. Near the first rampart stands an isolated building,

the Koubba el-Khayatine or Pavilion of the Ambassadors, a reception center for foreign agents on repatriation missions. From there, a stairway leads down to a subterranean prison that once held Christian captives.

The Habs Qara prison (also referred to as the Kara, for the Portuguese builder who conceived the project) was initially intended as an underground storage silo, hence the name “matamore” that is often associated with it. We shall return to this facility with Germain Moüette’s account later in these pages, so a few details here will suffice. The Habs Qara was where Christian prisoners spent the night; it also contained their life support, including kitchens, a bakery, a clinic, and a distillery. Measuring about two hundred meters in length and width, and approximately four meters in height, the facility consists of a series of arcades in an almost Gothic style. About fifty air ducts rose into the courtyard before the Pavilion of the Ambassadors to provide ventilation. The conditions were rudimentary, to say the least.

Prisoners were worked from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, with a mere seven days off per year. The food was insufficient in both quantity and protein. Their only succor was fruit brandy, which they were permitted to distill, and a small priory consisting of a prior, four monks, and a physician, generously funded by the king of Spain.²² Although Moüette provided the definitive account of the captives’ living conditions, Thomas Pellow summed up as succulently as any their quotidian routine:

At daybreak, the guardians of several dungeons, where the Christians are shut up for the night, rouse them with curses and blows to their work, which here is not repairing or rigging of ships, but more laborious, as it consists in providing materials for the Emperor’s extravagant buildings, stamping earth mixed with lime and water, in a wooden box near three yards long and three feet deep, and of the attended breadth of the wall. Their instrument for this is a heavy wood stamper. Others prepare and mix the earth, or dig quarries for lime stones; others burn them. Some are employed to carry large baskets of earth; some drive wagons drawn by six bulls and two horses; and, after the toil of the day, these miserable carters watch their cattle in the field at night, and in all weathers, as their life must answer for any incident. The

task of many is to saw, cut, cement and erect marble pillars, and, for such who are qualified, to make gunpowder and small arms; yet does not their skill procure them any better treatment than those who, having only the use of their limbs without any ingenuity, are set the coarsest works, as tending horses, sweeping stables, carrying burthens, grinding with hand mills.²³

Not every population suffered. One very contented group benefited from Moulay Ismail's great project. These creatures were in no rush to gnaw their way to freedom, not with such a buffet as they enjoyed. As Windus recorded,

Going to take the following prospect of this Palace [Dar al-Makhzen], we passed over a large Field, on each side of the pathway of which there were a great number of large Ratts [sic.], which burrowed into the Earth like Rabbits, and ran around so thick that the Ground was almost covered with them, letting us come within seven or eight Yards before they would go into their Holes; and, having passed as far, they appeared above Ground again, so that both before and behind us, we saw of multitude of them.²⁴

5

THE CAPTIVE

A single loaf the stomach will supply; but not the earth's richest gifts the greedy eye.

—Shaykh Saadi, Persian poet¹

Morocco, 1670–1681

I t was nobody's fault, just bad luck. Almost from the day they set sail from Dieppe, the weather had played havoc with their crossing. First a violent storm drove them to seek shelter near Dover for several days, and then gusting winds peppered them for the better part of two weeks, blowing them off course to the southwest. The delays had put them in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it was easier to blame the captain, as most of the passengers and crew were doing with gusto. He had been a gullible fool for allowing the Moors to board his frigate, at least without a fight. The Royal had six guns, but they had been outgunned by the two Moorish ships. Still, it would have been better to put up a fight than to be sold into slavery, perhaps never to return to France.

Germain Moüette sat below deck, staring at his shackled legs and depressed beyond description. Only two days earlier, he and his cousin, Claude Loyer La Garde, had been daydreaming about their future prospects in the West

Indies and the exotic life of the tropics that awaited them.² Now this. How suddenly had the world been turned upside down.

Yes, the fates had been most unkind. A month into the trip, they should have been well clear of the pirate hunting grounds in the Bay of Biscay. But on October 16, when they finally emerged from the foul weather, they spied two ships flying Turkish colors—smaller, faster vessels that soon closed to within hailing distance. A chesty, turbaned fellow hailed them and announced that they were from Algiers. The Royal was flying French colors, but it was common enough for ships to carry a battery of false colors for purposes of deception, so the Turk asked to come aboard to check their papers. Not to worry, he insisted. We are at peace with France. After heated discussion among the crew, the captain unwisely agreed. A party of Muslims boarded and promptly assaulted the crew and took them prisoner. More ruffians went below and herded the passengers on deck. Then, as the lewd, gap-toothed beasts probed, began the humiliations of slavery. The inventory commenced: forty captives, including a chevalier, or gentleman, and his son, four women and a number of children, rich stores of fine clothes, jewelry, household items, and the ship's stores. For the corsairs, it was a nice day's work.

Hours later, when the passengers and crew of the Royal had been divided between the two ships and secured below deck, word circulated that the Christians had been tricked. Their captors were Moors, not Turks, and they were headed to Salé, not Algiers—not that it much mattered. One slave market was as dire as another.³

When Moüette arrived in Morocco, captivity in Salé was pretty much the same experience as elsewhere in the Barbary, although that would soon change with the ascension of Moulay Ismail. But in the autumn of 1670, Moulay Rachid was sultan, the city of Salé was still a corsair republic, and there was no imperial monopoly on Christian slaves. Within a few days of their arrival, the Frenchman and his fellow captives found themselves on the auction block for sale to the highest bidder. A few dregs went for a pittance. Moüette sold for 360 écus, a pretty good price, he thought, with an odd feeling of pride, until he witnessed the flaccid Chevalier de Malte fetch

fifteen hundred. He consoled himself, however, knowing that le petit connard's price reflected an anticipated ransom—not the fellow's worth.

Moüette was impressed with Salé's fortifications, which were centered around the twin "castles" at the mouth of the Bou Regreg River, that of New Salé (present Rabat) and the Udayas Kasbah on the south bank, and the older city on the opposite shore. Here he would spend his first two years of captivity, and it was, all things considered, a tolerable existence. He worked for several benevolent masters, and his duties—bread maker and stable hand—were bearable, as were the victuals and the temperate littoral climate; and proximity to his nation's consul and the sea provided a degree of psychological support.

Alas, it could not last. One of Moüette's part owners, the rapacious governor of the city, Ahmad ben Yencourt, decided to press the redemption of the young, underemployed infidel. He bought out the other proprietors and demanded that Moüette raise a ransom of one thousand crowns. Apalled at the preposterous sum, Moüette flatly refused to play along. Yencourt was amused. Flashing his toothy grin, he chuckled, Really? Send the sluggard to the masons!

The young man's mulishness lasted two and a half months before the hoisting and troweling brought him to his senses. A price of six hundred crowns was agreed upon, and a contract was drawn up with the French consul acting as intermediary. However, the Franco-Dutch War of 1672–78 was raging in Europe, so there were no merchant ships to carry Moüette's request back to France. After a few weeks, Yencourt lost patience and tossed him back into the dust and quicklime, heaping a twenty-five-pound chain upon him for good measure.

A few months later, Moüette's fortunes took another turn. Shortly after Moulay Ismail came to the throne in 1672, Yencourt was recalled to court, and he dispatched his property, including Moüette and seven other Christians, to Fez for safekeeping. The captives were chained together and driven on foot for two weeks in the summer heat, arriving in Fez just in time to experience the fourteen-month siege of the city (1672–73) when it rose in support of Ahmad ben Mahrez. While Yencourt was off campaigning for his king, Moüette and the others were left in the custody of

a black slave, who almost starved them on a subsistence of mainly bread and boiled herbs.⁴

Sometime after the end of the siege in October 1673, Moüette and other Christian captives in Fez were appropriated by Moulay Ismail and ordered to the new capital, Meknes. The sultan was beginning the construction of his imperial city, and he required all available slave labor. Ismail further imposed a royal monopoly on all new captives and compelled the corsairs of Salé to comply with his edict.

Poor Moüette. He might have considered that his situation was improving, what with the end of the siege, a bit of protein in his tin, and being out from under the loathed Yencourt's boot, but his hopes were soon dashed. In Meknes, it was back to the mason crew.

The mason crews had perhaps the most physically demanding of the jobs performed by the Christian captives. Typically, it was organized around two gangs of laborers. The first gang prepared and staged the raw components of mortar—water, gravel, earth, and lime—at the construction site. This was loaded into buckets and hauled by pulley up to the level and section of wall being built. Then another crew retrieved the materials, which were poured into wood molds that had been affixed to the section being worked, where they were mixed and left to harden. The molds were then removed and shifted to another section farther on down the wall. If the wall was part of a palace, it was faced with squares of polished marble or whitewash. Most of the walls were ramparts, kilometer after kilometer of them, whose exterior was finished with a slathering of a looser mix. When dry, the ochre color harmonized perfectly with the landscape.

It was brutal labor that destroyed the back and left the palms of the hands swollen with rope burns—and there were other hazards. The lime, or calcium oxide, which since antiquity had been used as a hardening compound, was caustic to the eyes, cuts, and abrasions. As sections of wall neared completion, the men would find themselves working at heights as high as fifteen meters above ground without any safety equipment. Men fell and suffered broken bones, and more than a few were killed.

The grind was dawn to dusk, all weather and under the most exacting conditions. Their clothing was an ungainly cassock of rough wool, with drooping sleeves and an enormous hood, in Moüette's words, like a "hermit's robe." It was hell in summer, snagged on any protrusion, and chafed the neck terribly. In contrast, their flimsy shoes disintegrated quickly at their work sites. Just as pitiful as their attire was the food, consisting of rough bread during the day, rationed at about fourteen ounces per man, and at night a thin porridge with whatever meat and vegetables could be had. The poor fare earned the hapless cooks constant verbal abuse from the starving prisoners.⁵ Men scavenged for anything edible—pigeons, rats, roots, and bugs. Overworked and underfed, every human frame was worn to bone and sinew.

Finally, when things were at their lowest, Moüette got a lucky break when he was taken off the mason gang and assigned to a Moor he called Bougiman. This fellow was an Islamic scholar, painter, and sculpture artist, and the Frenchman's duties for him were mainly making dyes and mixing plaster. It seemed a heaven-sent reprieve, especially since his new master was about as mild as they came and decidedly lukewarm about the ruling family. Earlier Bougiman had run afoul of the Alaouites, and his property had been confiscated. The artist had probably taken on royal construction assignments to rebuild his reputation and his finances. Though Moüette's account is unclear, it appears that Bougiman employed him on at least a part-time basis over the next few years. Moreover, the Moroccan savant condescended to instruct the young infidel in Arabic and Spanish, and to impart a bit of the history of the land, its political and economic organization, and the precepts and customs of Islam—which Moüette gratefully acknowledged later in his account of his captivity, *Relation de la captivité du Sr. Moüette dans les royaumes de Fez et de Maroc.*⁶

This change of scenery probably saved Germain Moüette's life, because the toil was almost unrelenting—seven days a week, 358 days a year. The captives were given seven days of rest per annum, including a day each for the start of Ramadan, the Feast of the Sacrifice, and the birth of the Prophet, plus four Christian observances—Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the Nativity of the Virgin.⁷ The overseers kept careful watch over their crews, construction objectives and timelines were mapped out for each project, and

malingering was not tolerated. A man had to be seriously ill to be exempted from his duties, and he was allowed the minimum time to get back on his feet. Moüette wrote,

When one is sick, one is no better treated than when one is well. The common allowance for the king's slaves was a porridge of old flour and a bit of olive oil. They got no rest; their pitiless guards, incited by the Moorish foremen who want to advance their works, refuse to exempt them from work until it is seen that they can move neither hand nor foot. Then, they might be exempted from work for as long as their weakness keeps them in bed; as soon as they start to walk, they are made to resume work. All the favor that is shown them is that first they put them upon the least demanding chores, like putting out torches, sweeping the streets, and maintaining the stables.⁸

Most of the slaves, according to Moüette, slept underground in the subterranean prison, the Habs Qara, just outside the western end of the imperial city. The prison was accessed through a narrow opening from which dangled a rope ladder. At night, the ladder was drawn up and the opening was secured by a gate of iron grille. The prison was a uniform series of arcades, sections of which were reserved for life support functions. There were kitchens for the six cooks and a bakery for the thirty captives who concocted the sawdust that answered for bread. Other areas were reserved for the distillery, a chapel run by the Franciscans, and a small clinic, but most of the space was occupied by dormitories. The air was tolerable during the day when the slaves and their latrine buckets went aloft, but nighttime was another matter. The ground moisture made mattresses stink; some of the fortunate men had mattresses of goat or sheep skin, but all were stuffed with reeds that decayed in the humidity. As the night wore on, the place grew intolerably acrid as the temperature rose in the close confines. The stench of unwashed bodies, sickness, and overflowing latrine buckets made a man forget his fetid mattress. Flies, mosquitos, and rats feasted and grew bold.⁹

Naturally, men living under such horrid conditions suffered poor health and were plagued by illness—diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, malaria, and typhus, to name but a few. Men feeble from overwork and malnourishment succumbed all too readily, despite the best efforts of the doctor-priests to keep them going. Just about every week, sometimes more often, a detail of men carried the dead outside the palace walls, where they were buried in shallow, unmarked graves. No one knew who would be next.

There were some sources of solace—the Franciscans, prayer, and each other. Mail was also of great importance. The prisoners were able to send and receive mail, though the business could be problematic. Some states, such as the Holy Roman Empire, had an organized means for handling mail, but most did not. The primary method of passing correspondence on land was a courier system, while at sea it was ship-to-ship transfer. For the most part, mail in Europe and much of the world was a matter of custom and dependent upon a common empathy for receiving news of a loved one. Such methods had their obvious inefficiencies, but the fact that it worked reasonably well is extraordinary.

From Morocco, the captives' correspondence usually passed through merchants or the foreign consuls of Salé and Tétouan. From there, a letter would find its way on a ship headed to the captive's home country, to be passed off again to someone headed closer to the recipient, and so forth. The Moroccans permitted the traffic because it stimulated ransom activity, and they were little concerned with the implications these plaintive appeals held for public relations. There is little doubt that these tales of woe resonated throughout much of Europe and spurred charitable networks and, on occasion, governments into action. For the captive, a letter from home was a treasured godsend, because he could never be certain of receiving another, given his circumstances and the long and circuitous nature of mail.

Liquor was the more reliable crutch. The distribution of the ration of eau de vie, a clear fruit brandy, was the highlight of any day. This rather novel approach to prisoner control was not Moulay Ismail's idea, but he was pragmatic enough to continue the practice. Years earlier, Moulay Rachid, concerned about the declining work of his Christian captives at Fez, was told that one way to improve their performance was to indulge their alcohol

vice. Rachid allowed an experiment, which produced the desired results. So he allowed the captives to build more stills, and he ordered the Jews of the city to henceforth provide every week ten quintals each of dried raisins and figs (about two thousand kilograms) to the captives. It quickly became a thriving enterprise employing several full-time brewers. For the inveterate toper, hardened seamen for the most part, this dainty beverage hardly sufficed, but it took the edge off their misery. And just as importantly, it formed the basis of a clandestine economy. At night, Muslim jailors would sneak down to partake of this illicit beverage in exchange for a few precious wares, such as clothes, foodstuffs, and tobacco. It was a high-risk operation, and death was a certainty for anyone exposed in such a wicked act.¹⁰

Although there was a certain amount of fraternization at night, during the day it was all business. Even the Abid who drank with the prisoners had to play the part of taskmaster at the construction sites. Some overseers played their part for the sultan's benefit, but others clearly relished their lordly status vis-à-vis the captives. Moüette happened upon one of the latter upon his arrival in Meknes. All day long, the brute cursed and clubbed with his baton. When he could not reach a man, the beast threw stones at him. Moüette and his mates ate as they worked, because there was no time allotted for rest. The salaud's howl of 'eoü-y-alla caujou!—Out, quickly!— heralded the opening of the hole at dawn, and each evening his vicious oaths sounded their parting from the earthly world. The abuse went on for months. When they could endure no more, the captives in Moüette's work gang wrote a letter of appeal to the sultan, but if the missive was delivered, it engendered no reply. Finally, the prisoners became so desperate that they conspired to murder their tormentor, come what may. They agreed to lure him into the prison one night and assault him with knives, but someone tipped off the bastard and he became only more vicious. They even tossed around the idea of poisoning him, but before they could put their plan into motion, divine intervention arrived in the form of the plague.¹¹

Too bad the plague did not kill Moulay Ismail, the source of everyone's woes. In May 1678, when the corpses were beginning to pile up, the sultan locked himself away in the royal palace to ride it out. The captives implored the Almighty that the pestilence would deliver them from their misery, but

alas their prayers were not answered. After several weeks, the tyrant rode out of the palace and back into their lives.

Moüette cursed the *putain de merde* under his breath every time he stole a glimpse of him touring the work sites. Moulay Ismail was practically a daily presence, when he was not away on campaign, riding around to inspect the progress on various construction projects. On the sultan's approach, sights and sounds of sudden urgency passed down the line. The pace picked up and every trowel, pick, and shovel fell into a synchronized rhythm. The foremen joined the show with tonsil and whip. The sultan liked the cadence of men working in unison, and heaven help the man—captive or foreman—who failed to satisfy.

Germain Moüette provided one of the earliest descriptions of Moulay Ismail, presumably mixing in a bit of scuttlebutt from other captives and Jews he encountered:

[Moulay Ismail] is thirty-seven-years-old, rather tall but slender physique, though he seemed rather stout because of his clothes. His face was a bit long, hair light brown, and his features were well formed; he wore a long fuzzy beard, and his look was somewhat soft, but there was no indication of humanity, on the contrary, he was quite cruel; to such an extent that his subjects said there had never been one to equal him, other than the fact that he is the most miserly of princes, helping himself to horse shoes, mail, groceries, drugs, butter, honey, and other trifles that were in stores, which was more appropriate for a grocer than a great prince such as he.¹²

Interestingly, Moüette's account of his captivity contains few details about the sultan's extreme behavior. Perhaps this was a matter of perspective: being a captive, he was more inclined to dwell on the condition of captivity in Morocco than the salacious details of Moulay Ismail's cruelty, his tightfisted ways, and his sex life—topics that dominated the later accounts of Western visitors to Meknes. But Moüette did note the royal tantrum that

led to the murder of Bartolle Tyo, a Spaniard, whom the sultan had made supervisor of his stables.¹³

He also told the story of Bernard Bausset, a twenty-five-year-old French captive, one of the few who faced down the sultan and lived. According to Moüette, Ismail took a shine to the young man and wanted to advance him to a position of greater responsibility in his retinue, but he was stymied by Bausset's refusal to convert to Islam. When enticements failed to do the trick, the sultan tried thrashings, which only made Bausset more obstinate. Eventually the sultan lost his temper and commanded that the pigheaded infidel be thrown into his lion park. Bausset went chin up to meet his fate, showing panache by jumping into the lair of his own accord. Surrounded by fourteen lions, the intrepid Bausset calmly waited his end, but the beasts did not appear much interested. Human ears strained for telltale shrieks and roars, but hours passed without a sound from the park. Eventually a few of the sultan's advisers, impressed with the young man's pluck, prevailed upon their master to spare Bausset. Apparently suffering a rare pang of remorse —he had gone down to the lions' den twice to see if the business was done —Ismail did not need much convincing. After nine hours among the great cats, Bausset was rescued unharmed. The Frenchman's stock rose still further when, a few days later, three Moors were thrown into the den and torn to pieces.¹⁴

Tales from the palace made the rounds at the Habs Qara, and many were doubtless embellished for the benefit of greenhorns. But the men were really interested in only three things—food and drink, sex, and escape, in that order. Food and, to a lesser extent, drink dominated daily conversation. Newcomers remarked immediately about it, and it was an obsession. Even the most hardened seaman waxed on about dishes from his region, or his wife's or his mother's recipes, or the first meal he would have back home. Now and again, someone would turn the subject to sex or some other thing, but invariably the conversation found its way back to food.

Escape was another frequent topic, since everyone dreamed of freedom and the lives they had left behind. However, few men seriously contemplated making an attempt at gaining their liberty. Always a difficult proposition, it seemed nearly impossible after 1684, with the English having evacuated

Tangiers and with Ceuta under siege. Thereafter, the options for the escapee were even more problematic. A man could try for Tétouan or Salé, where he might beg his way aboard a foreign vessel or find refuge with his nation's counsel. He might try the Spanish bastion of Melilla on the Mediterranean coast, or the Portuguese enclave of Mazagan on the Atlantic seaboard, but each had its difficulties.

A few brave men tried, and some, like Thomas Pellow, succeeded. In eleven years, Moüette witnessed about twenty escape attempts. Most used the same approach: the would-be escapee would husband portions of bread, which he would dry in the sun until it was likehardtack. He would make or scrounge the rest of his supplies, sometimes trading his ration of liquor to his captors for a water skin, or a turban to cover his European features, or perhaps a little pocket money. Escapes might be initiated late in the afternoon at dusk, as the men were returning from their work sites. The escapee would drop into a prepared hiding spot, usually a ditch, outside the walls, where he would conceal himself. Another scenario was Friday, mosque day, during afternoon prayers, when the guard force was minimal. A few captives would distract the designated guard with tobacco while others hid the escapee in a ditch and covered him in camouflage—dirt and brush, leaving only the nose and mouth uncovered; others defecated around the area to keep the Moors away. After several hours, once it was suitably dark and quiet, the fellow would emerge from his hiding spot and be on his way.

We have no way of knowing the percentage of successful escapes; however, given the obstacles, most men probably did not make it far. On one occasion, two Spaniards were so thoroughly camouflaged that they were unable to dig their way clear and died in their hole. Most of those who escaped Meknes probably perished of thirst or injury, or they were waylaid by hostile villagers during the week or more it took to reach the coast. For those recaptured, the penalty could be severe. Moüette witnessed several escapees recaptured. These unfortunates were given at least two hundred lashes, and for weeks afterward they had to move about with their legs chained together by a steel bar. Another group of recaptured men from Salé were less fortunate and had their ears cut off.¹⁵

In September 1680, Germain Moüette bitterly observed his tenth year of captivity. He was now twenty-nine years old, though he looked much older. His face was weathered, crows' feet perched at the corners of his eyes, his forehead was furrowed, and his once-luxuriant hair was thinning on top. Worst of all were his hands, which looked like those of an old man. He had lost count of the men he had seen die in those ten years, and he must have despaired at the thought of joining them in a shallow grave outside the palace walls.

Moreover his overseer-turned-friend, Bougiman, had fallen ill and died earlier that year. It was more than the loss of a friend; many of those had already passed on. The Moroccan had been a harbor from the worst abuses of the gulag and a fount of knowledge and intellectual stimulation. Now that he was gone, Moüette felt acutely alone and exposed.

Moüette had no way of knowing, but as he lamented his prospects, a mission of redemption was at last on the way from France. Joseph Castel, of Toulouse, was a priest of the Royal, Celestial and Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy and the Redemption of the Captives, also known as the Mercedarians. That summer, Castel managed to persuade his superiors to undertake a mission to liberate the French captives in Morocco.¹⁶ A former captive at Meknes, Castel was a man of high character and a physician who had labored under rudimentary conditions to administer to the needs of the miserable captives. In Moüette's words, Castel was "generally beloved by all men for his goodness and charity." In 1676, Castel had been able to ransom himself and return to France, where he entered the Mercedarian Order and determined to devote his remaining years to the cause of his former prison mates.¹⁷ On his inaugural mission, Castel was accompanied by two fellow members of the order, Bernard Monel and Bernard Mege. Although Castel did not know precisely how many French captives were still alive in Meknes, he suspected their number was far greater than his modest war chest of ten thousand écus could support. He knew the bargaining would be fierce.

Departing by ship from Marseille, the delegation landed in Ceuta on December 22, 1680. They passed a bleak Christmas under the misty Riffan landscape and a steady, chilly rain. Fortunately the Spanish held an

excellent midnight mass, and they were not deficient in either grape or firewood. After the holiday observances, Castel, working through the Spanish garrison commander, sent a courier to the Moorish lines with a letter for the sultan. In the letter, Castel requested an audience for the purpose of redeeming “several” Frenchmen being held in captivity.

Moulay Ismail received the note a few days later, and he promptly dispatched his admiral, Abdallah ben Aïsha, to escort the priests to Meknes. The delegation arrived in the capital on February 19, 1691, and the sensation among the captives was immediate and electric. Just as suddenly, however, it abated for most men as word circulated that the priests had come to negotiate only for the Frenchmen among them.

After the requisite delay, Castel and his brother priests were escorted before Moulay Ismail. Moüette, having debriefed the priests following his liberation, would summarize these negotiations in his Relation. According to his account, the sultan was cordial in his welcome; a number of expensive presents always helped in that regard. However, these priests in their modest cassocks were not the grandes with whom he deigned to treat, let alone negotiate with. He quickly passed them off to the caïd Amar, the governor of the city of Ksar el-Kébir, who would be their interlocutor.

Even before the clip-clop of the sultan’s horse had faded into the distance, the pretense of civility all but evaporated. Amar crooked a finger at his translator, who hastened closer. The Moroccan’s hands disappeared behind him in a contemplative pose. His beard jutted out and the question followed, brusque and irksome: How much cash did they have with them? Castel replied that they had ten thousand écus. Truly, such a small sum? Castel explained that these funds were raised from public charity, and such fund-raising took time and did not yield great amounts. In obvious disbelief, Amar asked how it was that the greatest king in Europe had contributed nothing. He had done so in Algiers, after all. Father Monel, growing heated at the Moor’s insolence, replied, “If His Majesty wishes to free his subjects held in this kingdom, it will be not with his funds but with his cannons!”

Mege tried to intervene and calm the situation, but Amar’s blood was up now. “I suspect,” he hissed, “that you are not ‘redeemers,’ but merchants who have come to cheat my master. No doubt, you possess a secret list of

the choicest captives you plan to purchase—the richest and best of the lot!” Monel rolled his eyes, while Castel and Mege assured Amar that they were who they said they were and that they had come to redeem the poorest men. Their limited means did not permit otherwise. They hastened to add that their order was continuing to raise funds in France for the redemption of additional captives. Amar appeared to be mollified, if not entirely convinced.

The priests returned to their lodgings in the Jewish quarter, where they waited three days with neither news nor visitors from the palace.¹⁸ The three men analyzed the audience ad nauseam. What had gone wrong? Was it Amar? Monel’s impertinence? They asked the opinion of their Jewish hosts, who were not much help. Meanwhile, in the Habs Qara at night, the prisoners also speculated furiously. During the day, they stole glances toward the west end of the Palace City in hope of seeing some sign of unusual activity. Nothing.

On the fourth day, February 23, Castel asked the Jews to send for Amar. To the relief of the priests, Amar appeared soon thereafter, apparently undisturbed by their earlier contretemps. He agreed to arrange a follow-on audience with the sultan. Castel and his brothers exhaled and settled in for another wait—ideally a shorter one.

Shorter indeed. At four o’clock that afternoon, the priests were standing before Moulay Ismail—mounted on his charger, as was his custom—and Ben Aïsha. Such was the sultan’s tactic, to make them stew in the juices of uncertainty for a while and then pull them into a negotiation when they least expected it. The sultan asked if they wanted to purchase all his French slaves. Castel, who had learned that there were at least 130 of them, replied that he did, but that they had only ten thousand écus at present. He proposed twenty thousand for the lot, buying half of them now and then returning at a later date with the funds for the remainder. The sultan countered with thirty thousand écus, which seemed reasonable to him. After all, the Spanish had recently offered three times that amount for two hundred of their countrymen. Castel explained that such a sum raised from public charity was an enormous undertaking that would take months, perhaps years. As he spoke, Castel saw Moulay Ismail’s gaze drift and realized that the royal

attention was wandering. When the priest finished, Ismail returned his focus to his guests and straightened in the saddle, as if preparing to be off. He announced that for ten thousand écus, the priests could take thirty captives of their choosing. In spite of themselves, Monel and Mege spoke up. They dared not return home with such a meager return! Why, they would be pilloried, positively ruined by such a bargain!

After a few moments of this, the sultan relented and increased the number to fifty, with one proviso—he would determine the fifty. Castel and the others knew they had been outmaneuvered, but what could they do? Halfheartedly, they concurred. On one hand, fifty captives, though hardly a coup, was close to half of the Frenchmen being held. On the other hand, they knew that Ismail would probably consent to release only those least useful to him, the oldest and most infirm. The priests would have preferred men who had left behind wives and young children in France.

Without further delay, Moulay Ismail commanded that the French workers be rounded up and brought before him. Teams of Abid sprinted to the various work sites, and gradually over the next hour or so, small groups of captives—two here, four there—assembled into a long line near the Pavilion of the Ambassadors. Normally such a thing would have inspired terror, but this day the mood was entirely different. The captives looked before them and saw the French priests. It was the hour of deliverance.¹⁹

Moulay Ismail surveyed the ragged rank, his visage a mask of distaste. Atop his black charger, he was a stark contrast in white with a broad gold belt, bejeweled sword, and red turban. Ben Aïsha stood to one side, and as the sultan turned to speak to him, Moüette caught part of their exchange. He heard the admiral reply that they should set aside the sea captains from the common sailors, merchants, and tradesmen, since the former offered better ransom potential. Ismail appeared to agree.

The sultan rode down the line of captives using his lance as a pointer. Following closely were a black slave porting the traditional umbrella and a few club-toting Abid. By now, Moüette had overheard enough to know what was about to happen: The sultan was preparing to select the prisoners to ransom. The other captives could only guess. Ismail drew closer. What is wrong with this dog? Lame? This one's job? This one has the head of an old

goat. Take him as well. The Abid began to prod the chosen few into a group. A wave of consternation swept over the captives as it became clear that some of them would be out of luck.

Realizing that the old and infirm were being singled out for sale and that he was too young and healthy to stand any chance of being selected, Moüette determined to act. When Ismail passed him, Moüette stepped forward, evading the reach of a guard, and threw himself on the ground at the horse's feet. He slobbered a hoof with kisses, suppressing the urge to wipe his mouth, and groveled unabashedly for his own release.

Allah ibarik phi amrik, Sidi! (God bless thy power, Master!) I beseech you, Lord, for my release, for I have been captive longer than most. The men with whom I was captured are either ransomed or dead. I have been here eleven years, and I have served well and done all that was asked of me. I am a poor man, Master, and therefore have no hope of raising a ransom.

Moüette supposed that Ismail was listening, since the hooves remained in place. But no sooner had he stopped babbling than hands grabbed his upper arms and pulled him back upright and out of the sultan's path. Only then did Moüette discreetly spit out the dirt from his mouth.

He would not be so easily dismissed. It might mean his death, but Moüette had nothing to lose. Several minutes later, when Ismail passed his way again, he threw himself once more in the path of the sultan's horse and ate more dirt. The sultan was impressed enough with Moüette's nerve to ask one of the guards about the captive's duties. Told that he worked as a dyer and sometimes in plasterwork, Ismail was satisfied he could spare the slave. He commanded that Moüette join the group of captives to be ransomed, at which Moüette "kissed the ground to thank him."²⁰

They were not all old and infirm. Along with Germain, one of the able-bodied captives ransomed was Bernard Bausset, of lion park fame.²¹

On February 25, Germain Moüette and forty-nine other giddy captives left behind Moulay Ismail. They proceeded from Meknes to Tétouan, there to await passage to Europe. This took several weeks, but on May 13 they

departed for Malaga, Spain. Finally, on May 26, 1691, Moüette stepped ashore in Marseille. Again he kissed the earth, this time earnestly.²²

For Moüette and the other captives, the experience in Morocco had been life changing. Although he was deeply grateful to the religious orders who toiled for the liberation of the Barbary captives, Moüette was scornful of governments that lifted not a finger to help, and he reserved special invective for the European merchants in Morocco who grew rich off the ransom process. Because merchants were often the only foreign representatives in Morocco, they were sometimes employed as negotiators and intermediaries by religious orders and families looking to ransom specific captives. According to Moüette, these merchants were frequently double-dealing cheats who tried to leverage their position for a cut of the action. Because they tried to work both sides, they could delay negotiations for months and even years. Moüette related that the release of his cousin, Claude Loyer de La Garde, was held up for two years after the ransom arrived in Morocco because of the maneuverings of one such villain.

Germain Moüette, like other foreigners steeped in the phenomenon of Moulay Ismail, returned home with a compulsion, both emotional and practical, to share the horror show. His case was typical, for he wanted to raise consciousness about the condition of Christian captives in Morocco, but he was also unemployed and in need of money. In 1693, almost two years to the day after he returned to France, his *Relation* was published in Paris. The book enjoyed some success in its day, and it became a reference for several subsequent accounts of Moulay Ismail's rule.

Sadly, Moüette never fully recovered his health. Ten years after his return from Morocco, he died in Paris at the age of forty.

6

PEOPLE OF THE SHADOWS

A dynasty rarely establishes itself firmly in lands with many different tribal groups. This is because of differences in opinion and desires. Behind each opinion and desire there is a group feeling defending it. The inhabitants of those lands [Ifrīqiyah and the Maghreb] are Berber tribes and groups. The first (Muslim) victory over them and the European Christians (in the Maghreb) was of no avail. They continued to rebel and apostatize time after time. After the Muslim religion had been established among them, they went on revolting and seceding, and they adopted dissident religious opinions many times. They remained disobedient and unmanageable.

—Ibn Khaldūn¹

Morocco, 1678–1687

It was October 16, 1678, the day before the start of the holy month of Ramadan. Tomorrow would be the observance of the Aïd el-Kebir, the Feast of the Sacrifice.² It was a sacred time for the ummah, the Islamic community, the day when Muslims honor the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to Allah's command; it was also a recognition of Allah's munificence in providing Ibrahim with a male goat to sacrifice instead. In commemoration, Sultan Moulay Ismail, Commander of the Faithful, like every Islamic ruler before him, would sally forth from his palace for the ritual sacrifice. As slaves held the beast in a kneeling

position, head down, Ismail would pass his blade across the neck of a select white cow. A sultan could splurge, unlike most of his subjects, who would kill a sheep or a goat.

The impending festivities did nothing to improve Moulay Ismail's sour mood. He was not by nature a reflective person, but religious occasions, with the attendant devotions and high rhetoric, made a man think about what he had achieved of late.

And what had he accomplished? He had captured Fez once and Marrakech twice, campaigned in the Riff, the Middle Atlas, the Sous, and points farther south, and sparred with the Turks in neighboring Algeria. Moulay Ismail had barely spent more than a month at a time in Meknes, and he had forgotten all the horses he had gone through. Nevertheless, despite all his activity, the kingdom was still in turmoil. Troublemakers remained at large, namely his older brother Moulay al-Harran and his nephew Ahmad Ben Mahrez. The perfidious al-Harran had fled his desert exile to foment discontent among the Aïn Atta Berber confederation. Ben Mahrez, thrashed repeatedly, refused to concede and was now holed up at Taroudant, the principal city of the Sous Valley. These fools, and brothers Hachem and Ahmad, did not represent much of a challenge. They were more of a nuisance, really, but they did have a way of kicking the hornet's nest.

The hornets were the Berbers, the bane of his existence! The Sanhaja tribes of the Middle Atlas, resentful and pining for the lost Dilâ, were in open revolt. The carnage that Ismail had left behind at Tadla a year earlier obviously had not sent the intended message. In the far eastern region, near the Algerian frontier, the Beni Yznâsen had gone over to brigandage. The tribes of the High Atlas sent not so much as a goat in taxes. For the time being, they remained in the shadows, out of sight and out of reach. The entire country was armed to the teeth, and no traveler was safe. The infidels profited from the chaos by retaining their grip on several coastal enclaves—Mazagan, Mamora, Tangiers, and Larache on the Atlantic coast, and Ceuta, Melilla, Peñôn de Vélez, and several small islands on the Mediterranean. His initial effort against Tangiers early that year had failed.

This was the state of affairs after six years of rule? It was intolerable! Angry, of course. Discouraged, no. He was chorfa, after all. “If Allah has

given me a kingdom,” Moulay Ismail was fond of observing, “no one may take it away.”³ Since many pockets of the kingdom stubbornly would not reconcile themselves to that fact, the war would go on after the holy observances of fasting and prayer.

Fortunately for the sultan, his enemies were largely divided, the tribes in particular. Gone was the era of the grand alliances of Berber tribes under the banner of a zawiya like the Dilâ. Now they were, at best, pockets of tribal confederations linked by distant blood ties, history, or common interest, so Moulay Ismail was able to take them on one by one.

The campaign to pacify the bled siba began in earnest in 1678, when the Aïn Atta were the first of the recalcitrant parties to find themselves in the sultan’s crosshairs. These Berbers of southeastern Morocco had for some time spurned the ruler’s control, which was not uncommon, but they had recently attracted Ismail’s ire by harboring three of the principal troublemakers, his estranged brothers, al-Harran, Hachem, and Ahmad. The sultan had sent messages upbraiding the Aïn Atta tribal chiefs for harboring his enemies and failing to pay their taxes. Should they rectify these wrongdoings, the sultan promised them a wide degree of autonomy. Ismail had been waiting months for a reply, and he now suspected that the Aïn Atta were stalling for the onset of winter, which would close the mountain passes. The sultan mulled over his choices. He could delay another six months, or he could wait out the holy month and conduct a winter campaign. He chose the latter.

Amid Ramadan’s languorous days, preparations began. Orders went out for the army to concentrate near the capital. They came from various points, the Arab jayish tribes known collectively as the Udaya, including the Maqil, Oulad Jirar, Zourara, Chebânat, Udaya, and Mghafra. There were renegade and zawaya military contingents, and mercenaries and Andalusians manned the train of artillery. Joining this disparate group were thousands of Abid from Machra ar-Remla.⁴ Every man brought his own kit except the Abid, who drew mounts and weapons from the imperial stores. Moussa ben Youssef, the commander of the expedition, drilled the troops as much as their fasting regimen would allow. After the final observance of Eid al-Fitr, which closed the holy month, Moulay Ismail marched his army east toward

the village of Azrou, where the ascent and trek across the mountains would begin.

Conditions were miserable almost from the start. A cold rain fell upon the columns of men as they advanced into the mountains. When it was not raining, the heavy mist hung in the pine and cedar forests, and the narrow trails quickly became quagmires. By the time they reach Midelt, on a plain between the Middle and High Atlas, and a little more than halfway through the mountains, the ground had a crust of frost. Snow, which many men had never seen up close, weighed down tree limbs and pelted heads as it fell in clumps from on high. Nights were particularly miserable, as temperatures plunged to near freezing. The available wood was plentiful but too wet to burn properly. Only the officers had tents. The rank and file huddled together under blankets to shiver away the night hours.

The sultan was oblivious to these nocturnal privations, swaddled in his mobile court, a tented complex called the mahalla. At the center of concentric rings of tents was the afrâg, the imperial pavilions. This was another world, where fires crackled in enormous hearths of brass, myrrh incense hid the stench of dung, and carpets covered the frozen earth. The sultan and his officers feasted on giant platters of couscous, washed down with copious amounts of steaming mint tea. The emperor's bed was never cold, for he routinely traveled with an excellent supply of concubines, sometimes a hundred or so.⁵

By the time the exhausted, footsore army had descended from the mountains, they were hardly fit to fight. They dried off as they dragged themselves across the hammada, the pre-Saharan plateau of windswept rock, toward the town of Errachidia, where Ben Youssef gave them a short rest. When the soldiers were able to resume the advance, he prodded them south for the three-hundred-kilometer march to the city of Ourzarzate, in the heart of the Aïn Atta territory.

The Aïn Atta army gave ground, sniping from a distance as they drew the imperial forces deeper into their territory. The two sides finally came face-to-face east of Ourzarzate in the foothills of the Saghro Mountains. The Saghro range is an eastern prolongation of the Anti-Atlas, separated from the latter eons ago by the Dra'a River. It's a dramatic landscape of

sandstone buttes and the driest mountain range in the entire Atlas system. The details of the battle of February 3, 1679, are incomplete, but it was apparently a stiff fight. Ismail prevailed, scattering the Berber forces and driving them toward the desert. The sultan's losses were not inconsiderable: four hundred men dead, including his general, Moussa ben Youssef, and hundreds more wounded.

As usual after a fight, the victor turned his attention to booty. Dozens of villages, either left in the care of the elderly or abandoned altogether, were open to plunder. Ismail had sent his troops to bag the loot and his cavalry were rounding up the herds, when suddenly horns sounded the alarm.

Contingents of the Aïn Atta horsemen had circled back, and they fell upon several imperial cavalry detachments as they were corralling livestock. The Berbers extracted a degree of revenge and a number of the sultan's units were badly mauled. Fortunately for Ismail, the Aïn Atta did not attack in force, and he was able to rally his men and drive them off once more.

Thus far the campaign had been a qualified success: Moulay Ismail had prevailed, but he doubted that the Aïn Atta were much impressed. He would probably be back here again during the campaigning season with a larger force. Moreover, his brothers had once more evaded capture, and he knew that he had not heard the last from them. He had also not seen the last of the Aïn Atta. When Moulay Ismail began the march north to Marrakech, he encountered a scorched earth policy of empty larders, hollow granaries, ruined crops, and palm trees denuded of dates. Not so much as a wild dog could be found, and unseen marksmen took potshots at his columns of men.

Moulay Ismail chose to redeploy his army to the friendlier confines of the western plains by marching through the High Atlas to Marrakech, rather than retracing his footsteps to Meknes. It was the shorter route, but the more hazardous at this time of the year. It was a mistake that nearly cost him his army and his life.

The High Atlas Mountains featured the most extreme terrain in the land: peaks that exceeded four thousand meters in height, impassable ridgelines, and perilous chasms. Picking through the bleak landscape of rock-strewn ravines was exhausting—slip-slide two steps forward, stagger to the side, repeat. Horses stumbled and fell, and wheels came off carts. This was also

enemy territory; the Berbers were all but invisible, but now and then one caught a glimpse of their ksour, which in this region were made of the ubiquitous blue-gray building material.

The uncontested part of the mountain crossing was short-lived. When the column reached the inevitable bottleneck, the sultan's men quickly learned to be ready for a local reception. Sometimes it was only a few desultory shots, but on other occasions the entire local male population turned out and Berbers young and old rained stones and gunfire down upon the despot and his despised Arabs and haratin. The hottest of these hayseed gatherings forced the army to divert to an alternate route. Frustration mounted as the army meandered for days among the ravines and box canyons near the el-Glâoui Pass in the Deren, one of the most rugged regions of all.

The weather was also punishing. The rock faces often blocked the sun's warmth and funneled down chilly gusts from the peaks. Nighttime temperatures were below freezing, and hypothermia made its rounds through the ranks. As the army neared the highest altitudes, snow began to fall and the winds blew stronger. What followed was not just a squall, but a blizzard that lasted for seven days. To these men from a temperate climate, for whom gloves and boots were unknowns, the suffering was extreme. Ears, noses, fingers, and toes blackened with frostbite. As the snow got deeper, horses and mules foundered on unseen rocks, wagons were abandoned in the drifts, and booty and impedimenta littered the army's path. Everyone was bone tired but afraid to stop, for such brought death. When compelled to rest, the morning revealed the previous night's frozen victims. Only the women of the harem, cloistered in their horse-drawn covered wagons, were spared from the frozen horrors.

Finally, they reached the el-Glâoui Pass, only to discover that it too was barred, this time by Berber troops of the Guilaloa tribe.⁶ Eeeya! The troops groaned, near to weeping with exhaustion and exasperation. So close to Marrakech! While the soldiers and camp followers despaired, Moulay Ismail flew into a rage. He spurred his mount past the messenger, his bulging eyes sweeping the craggy heights for a way out, as his jowls worked for the words that, for once, failed him. Ismail's face was half

frozen, and ice hung from the royal beard. But his fit was temporary, and after thrashing a few slaves, the sultan regained his composure.

Humiliating though it was, Ismail had no choice but to negotiate, since his army was in no shape to fight. After another day or two of this, they might all lie down in the snow and die. So Ismail swallowed hard and sent the chief a golden helmet encrusted with precious stones, a few richly saddled horses, and several boxes of fine cloth and linen. The gifts had the desired effect, and the chief pulled back his troops; he even advised the sultan to make haste while he had a full moon. Moulay Ismail took his advice and promptly whipped his troops into motion, leaving behind the last of the booty they had taken at Saghro. They marched through the night, snaking their way down goat trails, and finally stepping onto the plain at dawn. All told, the ordeal in the High Atlas had cost Moulay Ismail another three hundred dead.

When the army finally camped at Sidi Rahhal, discipline went to the devil. As the sultan rediscovered the diminished pleasures of the *afrâg*, famished soldiers stole away from the camp and pounced upon any food they could find, cleaning out villages and butchering entire herds. The next day, the village elders complained to the sultan. The camp was thereafter ringed with sentries who were instructed to shoot on sight any man outside the cantonment. The officer judged to be responsible for this breech of discipline, a minister named Abderrahman Elmetrâri, was ordered to be tied to a horse's tail for the remainder of the march. He would later be executed and his body dumped upon a dunghill. As a more immediate example, Elmetrâri's innocent servants were shot before the assembled troops.⁷ This restored a sense of order, but the army was a spent force. Many were sick or required amputations for frostbite, and there were more than a few desertions. Upon reaching Marrakech, the army was effectively disbanded.

After a few days' rest, Moulay Ismail and his entourage headed back to the capital. Upon entering the city, the sultan was greeted by an escort of Abid who imparted the unwelcome news that the plague had arrived in the Gharb. Weeks earlier, while Ismail had been battling the Berbers at Saghro, the sickness had appeared in Tétouan, doubtless having traveled there from Europe. From there it made its way to Fez and potentially other urban

centers of the north.⁸ This appears to have been the same epidemic that claimed the life of Germain Moüette's oppressive overseer.

This was bad news, indeed, and much more troubling than pretenders and unruly Berbers. Little was feared more, in Morocco or elsewhere, than the bubonic plague, the so-called Black Death. The pandemic of the mid-fourteenth century had killed at least a third of the population of Europe and perhaps as many in the Maghreb. People instantly recognized the telltale signs: the quick progression from chills, cramps, and painful lymph gland swelling to gangrene of the extremities, acute fever, vomiting of blood, and delirium. Death usually followed within ten days. No one knew what caused the disease, how to treat it, or how to control its spread. One common reaction was to flee to the countryside, where the sickness seemed to be less prevalent.

Moulay Ismail considered this. However, when he learned that no one had yet fallen ill in Meknes, he determined to ride out the storm in his palace. He instructed the Abid to prevent anyone traveling from Fez from entering Meknes. The sultan's baraka was strong, and Meknes was spared the worst of the pestilence.

One year later, in 1680, Moulay Ismail had sufficiently reconstituted his forces, in part by drawing upon his first yield of fresh Abid from his "tawney Nurseries," and settled on his next objective. Of his many options, none seemed more pressing than to secure his eastern flank. For years, the Beni Yznâsen tribe had been ambushing merchants passing along the Angâd plain and raiding along the border.

Advancing from Taza, Moulay Ismail invaded the Beni Yznâsen territory, burning crops and knocking down villages. During this campaign, he developed the approach that he would subsequently employ in dealing with the Berbers. First, he reduced a confederation piecemeal, in this instance by first attacking the Segouna, then the Mehaïa, and finally the Ahlâf. He would overwhelm the enemy by advancing up their mountain redoubt from two sides, which caused apprehension among the defenders that their line of retreat would be cut off, often inducing them to flee after only a salvo or two of resistance. Next he offered them aman, or quarter, provided that they behave themselves, pay their taxes, and surrender to him their horses and

firearms. By taking their primary military resources, the sultan ensured that they would stay out of mischief. He also contrived an assurance against any backsliding, for as the proverb went, “By all means make friends with the dog, but do not lay aside the stick.”⁹ So as a third measure, Moulay Ismail determined to leave behind fortresses in key places, all manned by garrisons of loyal Abid. The locals were taxed with provisioning the troops and their mounts with a percentage of their harvest. In the years that followed, the sultan would construct seventy-six such forts.¹⁰

The sultan spent several weeks in the east, supervising the construction of three forts, each of which was subsequently manned by between one hundred and five hundred Abid soldiers and their families. He then proceeded to Taza, where he established a regional headquarters under a caïd who had at his disposal a garrison of 2,500 Abid. This officer’s duty was to supervise the forts under his command and keep open the lines of communication from the Saïs Plain to the Moulouya.¹¹

The situation in the north thus settled, it was time to deal with the tribes of the central mountain ranges. Over the next three years, from 1682 to 1684, Moulay Ismail undertook expeditions in the Middle and High Atlas to bring to heel some of the tribes that had beleaguered him during the campaign against the Aïn Atta. First he marched on the Beni Idrasen in Fazaz. When the Berbers retreated to their key mountain redoubt, the sultan declined to pursue them, instead choosing a stratagem of isolation and harassment. He constructed two forts, one at Aïn Ellouh and a second at Azrou, garrisoned with five hundred and a thousand Abid respectively.

This modest force apparently did such a good job of keeping the passes open and generally disrupting local commerce that within months the Beni Idrasen tribal leaders were in Meknes, supine and begging for relief. For unknown reasons, the sultan’s terms were unusually generous on this occasion. According to al-Zayyânî, under the usual terms of aman, the Beni Idrasen surrendered their horses and firearms, but the sultan alleviated their woes by making them custodians of the royal herd of sheep. In exchange for tending to the sultan’s twenty thousand sheep, which would later reach sixty thousand head, and providing an annual delivery of wool and butter, the Beni Idrasen were exempted from other obligations.¹²

From Fazaz, Moulay Ismail marched south to the eastern Deren region of the High Atlas Mountains. Using the strategy he had by now perfected, the sultan brought at least another nine Berber tribes into the fold. Interestingly, he left alone the Guilaloa, the tribe whose leader had earlier extracted rich gifts in exchange for passage through their territory. The sultan remained in the misty altitudes for a year, as the men toiled to complete eight forts, each of which housed a garrison of four hundred Abid soldiers and their families.¹³ Evidently, Machra ar-Remla was bearing bountiful fruit.

By the early 1680s, Moulay Ismail had made considerable inroads into pacifying the mountain tribes, but this had not been his only interest. Twice, he was drawn into border disputes with the Turks in Algeria. On the first occasion, in 1679, his advance on Tlemcen had been undone when his Arab jayish cavalry deserted during a Turkish bombardment and he had been forced to turn back. Three years later, he moved again to the Moulouya to fend off a reported Turkish invasion, only to learn that the Ottoman forces were occupied in fighting off a French fleet that had come to bombard Algiers. During this time, Moulay Ismail also made his first efforts against the Christian enclaves. In 1679, he sent an army to attack the English at Tangiers; when that failed, he ordered his commander to leave a siege force there and divert his main effort against the Spanish position at Mamora, which proved to be an easier nut to crack. In 1681, Mamora fell, the first of Moulay Ismail's jihadist triumphs.

In 1684, Moulay Ismail determined to renew the fight with his troublesome nephew. Advancing from Meknes at the head of a large army, the sultan attempted to engage the rebels in the open field. According to al-Zayyânî, the two sides fought a running twenty-five-day battle that left "an incalculable" number of dead on both sides. Ben Mahrez and his forces retired to Taroudant and a siege began. After a few weeks, the rebel leader and his followers fled into the hills, probably at the request of the city elders, and the sultan was content to return to his capital.¹⁴

Sparing Taroudant was a decision that Moulay Ismail soon came to regret, because Ben Mahrez drifted right back there within a year, this time with his uncle al-Harran. So it was pack and saddle once more, as Ismail hastened back to the Sous, but this time there would be hell to pay. For

thirteen years Ahmad Ben Mahrez had been a thorn in his uncle's side, and their cat-and-mouse game had been vexing and at times embarrassing. It finally ended in a way that Moulay Ismail could never have expected. One day, Ben Mahrez went on a pilgrimage to a local marabout near Taroudant. Rounding a bend on a bushy trail with his retinue of servants, he came face-to-face with a group of armed Zerâra militia, allies of Moulay Ismail. Not recognizing the traveler, and thus failing to appreciate his value as a prisoner, they attacked and killed Ben Mahrez.

Informed of who the dead man was, probably by one of Ben Mahrez's surviving servants, the local commander sent word to the sultan of the demise of his principal nemesis. The body lay where it fell for some days until Moulay Ismail rode up to inspect it. By then the corpse was bloated beyond recognition, and the sultan quickly determined that searching for any familiar features beneath the crust of flies was futile. He would have to be satisfied that the mound of rot was what remained of his nephew—and with that, in a magnanimous gesture, the sultan ordered the remains to be buried. Then he directed the siege to be continued, and he returned to Meknes.¹⁵

Moulay al-Harran held out at Taroudant until April 1687, turning back three major assaults by the sultan's army. However, that month the imperial forces finally breached the walls and stormed the city. Many died in the battle, but not al-Harran, who once again made his escape. No matter. Moulay Ismail would ensure that if his older brother ever made it back to this city, he would not be recognized and certainly not welcomed. The sultan's soldiers rounded up Taroudant's survivors, who meekly submitted to their fate and were beheaded in assembly line fashion. Months later, the empty city was repopulated with Berber troublemakers exiled from the Riff Mountains.¹⁶

Two months later, on July 1, the sultan emerged from his palace with the usual pomp to fete Aïd el-Kebir and the start of Ramadan. He was forty-one years old, an elderly man by the standards of the time, but he certainly did not feel his age. He was energized, and for the first time in a long time, he had cause for thanksgiving. More than satisfaction, it was a sense of vindication.

The cow eyed Moulay Ismail warily as he strode forward. He drew the sword from its gilded scabbard, the blade announcing itself as only the sharpest do. Ismail examined the steel and then held it aloft as he surveyed the thousands of turbaned heads standing silently at attention before him.

Let it be a lesson to you all, he thought. “If the prayers of dogs were answered,” went the proverb, “then bones would rain from the sky!”¹⁷

PART 2

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 9: Campaigns of Moulay Ismail

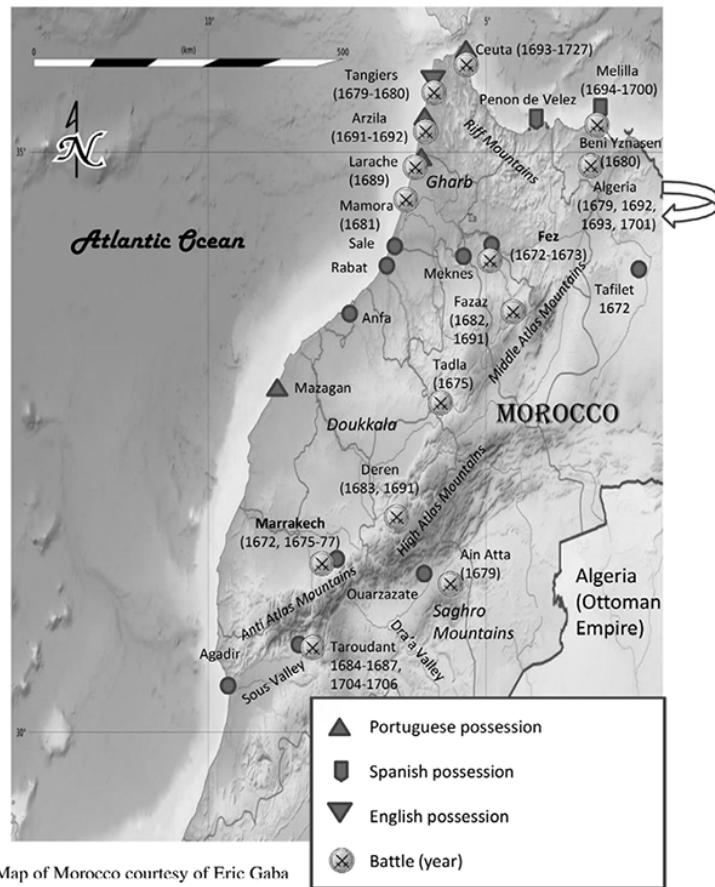


Figure 10: Berbers



Farmer of the Aït Bougmez
(High Atlas)
by Jean-Marie Louis
(*Le Haut Atlas et le Sud*,
Plate II)



Taskiouine dancer
(Anti-Atlas)
by Jean-Marie Louis
(*Le Haut Atlas et le Sud*,
Plate XIV)

Figure 11: Berbers

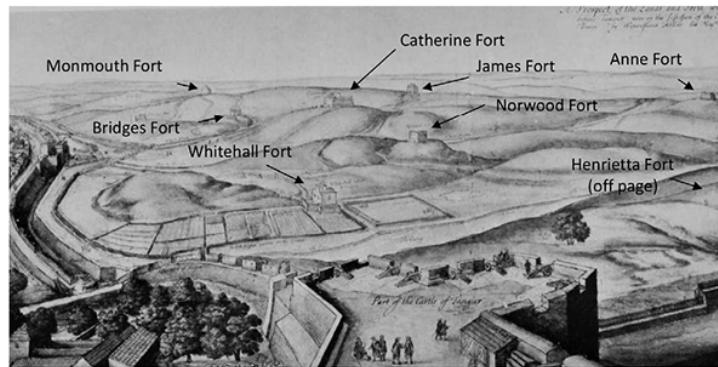


Woman of the Aït Bougmez
(High Atlas)
by Jean-Marie Louis
(*Le Haut Atlas et le Sud*,
Plate I)



Woman of the Aït Atta
(Eastern High Atlas-Sahara)
by Jean-Marie Louis
(*Le Haut Atlas et le Sud*,
Plate X)

Figure 12: Tangiers



Tangiers, viewed from the Petersborough Tower

(Routh, 297)



Tangiers, viewed from the harbor

(Routh, 361)

Figure 13: Larache and Arzila

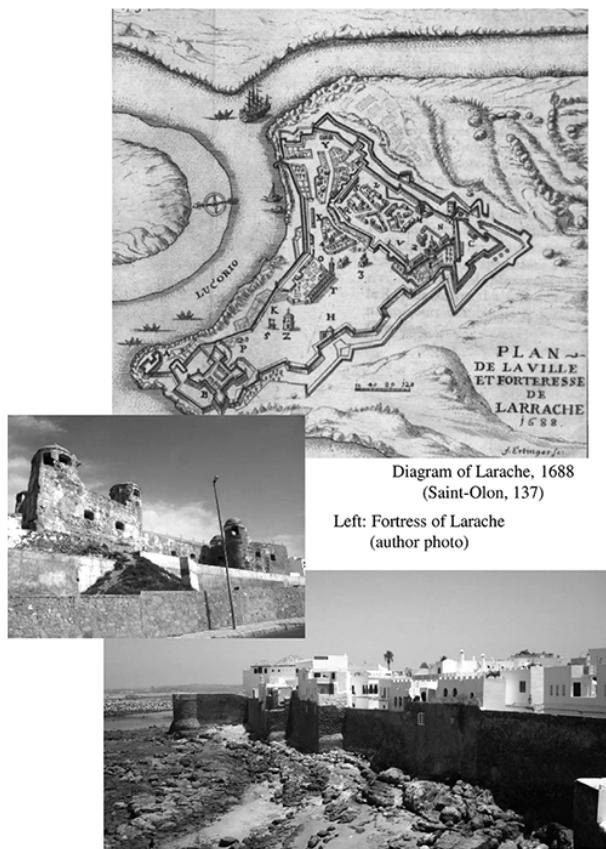
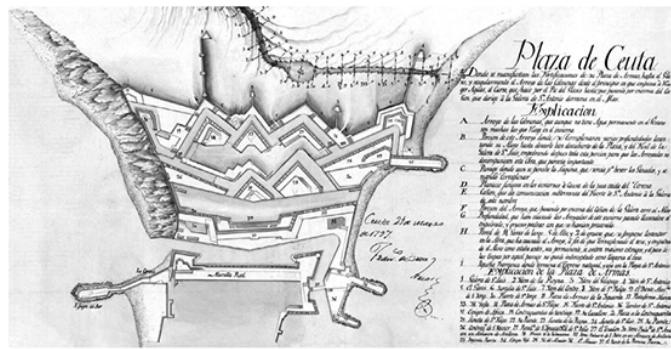


Figure 14: Ceuta



Land walls of Ceuta, circa 1797
(unknown artist)



Sea walls of Ceuta
(author photo)

NO PART OF ENGLAND

Now alas! Tangier, that cost us so dear
In money, lives, and fortunes,
See how the States, the kinder Fates,
For thine own Fate importunes!
Had this been plotted by the Moors,
Alas, it were no matter,
But blown up thus by thy own store,
Thou'dst better swom in water.

—Tangier's Lamentation¹

Tangiers, Morocco, 1680–1684

L ate in the evening of May 13, 1680, Omar Ben Haddou reclined on the carpeted floor in his field tent, finally alone. His commanders had received their orders for the morrow and departed. As he sipped his tea in silence, a

few moths danced about the lantern overhead, bounding against the glass and then resuming their kamikaze course.

Matters were finally coming to a head. After many months of grinding work—digging, digging, and more digging—they had all but squeezed the life out of the English. His officers reported that their men could hear the infidels arguing and smell their tobacco. The heavy rains of the past few days had flooded the trenches and brought the excavating to a near halt. No matter, they were close enough. Their trench lines surrounded the key enemy positions, and the mujahidin were within easy musket range of the infidels. Also, his men had finally brought several guns to bear upon one of the big forts and battered it into silence. The time to strike the decisive blow had arrived. Any further delay could only encourage a breakout gambit by the infidels. Certain activities told Ben Haddou that they were thinking along these lines—a spike in communications from the city, nocturnal sounds from within the forts, and the flicker of lights where darkness had once blanketed no-man's-land.

Omar Ben Haddou was governor of Ksar el-Kébir, responsible for the Gharb province, and the sultan's point man for Tangiers. He had treated with English governors for years, but now he commanded the Islamic forces aligned against them. This was the Alaouite regime's first foray into jihad; previously, the energies of Moulay Rachid and Moulay Ismail had been directed against domestic enemies. Even now, the sultan was off campaigning against the Beni Yznâsen in the east. Ben Haddou appreciated the ruler's confidence in him, but he also knew the consequence of failure. He had reminded his commanders of the same after the failed attempt to mine one of the big English forts. It had been a fiasco. The mine was detonated well short of the target, costing many barrels of precious powder and collapsing much of the mine shaft. Ben Haddou had the chief sapper hauled off to a grove of trees and strung up by the neck.

He hoped that such a spectacle would not again be necessary. Not that he shrank from shedding blood, but these Turkish engineers were valuable. His agents in Algiers had recruited several men with extensive experience in siege craft, and they were supervising the trenching and tunneling operations of the army. If he was obliged to kill any more of them, the

Turks might all slip away one night. He had considered delaying payment of their wages until he had a chance to gauge their collective state of mind. However, the Turks, callous bastards that they were, did not appear much fazed by the execution of one of their kind.

Yes, it was fortuitous that the sultan was on campaign. Ben Haddou would not have to answer for the latest delays or entertain the usual missives from the capital urging action and offering tactical vagaries. He would apprise his master when the last of the forward positions had been taken. Then he would be able to deploy his artillery to the hills around the city and bring the harbor into range, and after that, it would be just a matter of time until the English were forced to evacuate.

About a mile away, in his chambers in the Upper Castle, Sir Palmes Fairborne, the deputy governor, had come to the same conclusion: Tangiers was fast becoming untenable. He poured another claret and rose to go to the window, where he could absorb the ocean air and serenity of the port at night. The hour was late. Lord Inchiquin, his superior, must be slumbering peacefully. Out in the darkness, the tide audibly crashed against the mole, and a few ships bobbed gently in the anchorage.

Colonel Fairborne knew Tangiers better than any man in England. He had begun his military career as a captain in the Tangier Regiment of Foot back in 1661, and a few months later he had accompanied Lord Petersborough and the fleet to assume control of Tangiers from the Portuguese. On January 29, 1662, Fairborne first set foot on the shores of Tangiers, and he had spent much of the next eighteen years transforming the colony from a neglected outpost of Portugal's faded glory to one of the jewels of England's burgeoning empire.

By the 1670s, Tangiers had evolved into a rather unique colonial outpost—cosmopolitan, exotic, but distinctly English. By this time, the population included about three thousand Englishmen and their families, a few hundred Portuguese hangers-on, and Spanish, Dutch, and Italian merchants who had come to profit from the city's status as a free-trade zone. The place had a romantic allure with its Portuguese-style housing of stone and mud, clay roof tiles, and leafy verandas; many of the better homes had orange trees and garden patches where rosebushes and herbs, such as rosemary and

thyme, thrived. Bougainvillea, an ornamental vine with brilliant pink or purple flowers, graced the walls between many dwellings.

To this strange environment, the English had brought a bit of home. Most of the Catholic churches were either closed or converted to Anglican. The street signs now bore such homey names as Cannon Street and Salisbury Corner. The beer was plentiful, as were the wild boar and pickled oysters. But the climate was distinctly un-British—mild and sunny for most of the year. For many an Englishman, Irishman, and Scotsman, Tangiers was not a bad life, at least when they were in coin. At the least, it was an improvement on the grinding poverty, stifling class system, and awful weather of home.

Tangiers was still, however, an outpost in a hostile land. This was impressed upon the newcomers when, shortly before they arrived, the Moors ambushed and killed the Portuguese governor and fifty of his men while they were conducting a reconnaissance outside the city walls. Once they took charge, the English began improving the fortifications of the city. Under the Portuguese, Tangiers had already been a well-fortified place, featuring the Upper Castle, an extensive citadel on a hill on the northwest side of the city, and a fortified blockhouse guarding the seaward approach that the English renamed York Castle. Stout ramparts ran the landward side of the city, descending toward the sea, where the more economical construction reflected lesser concerns over a seaborne assault. At intervals along the walls were bastions of artillery positioned to achieve interlocking fire. The English repaired and strengthened the walls, and they added more artillery emplacements.

This was a start, but securing the colony would require a good deal more work. The chief weakness of the Tangiers defenses was the proximity of the surrounding hills, a problem shared by other foreign enclaves such as Arzila and Mamora. An enemy's possession of these heights offered excellent and defensible terrain for artillery. Since many of these forts, with their high masonry walls, were built in the same manner as of those of antiquity, they were highly vulnerable to cannon fire in the gunpowder age. The English were not about to rebuild the ramparts in the manner of the trace italienne, or the so-called star fort, as the Portuguese had done at Mazagan, for that

would have been far too expensive. Instead, they took the expedient approach in pushing the perimeter defenses forward from the ramparts by building a series of outposts on the heights leading to Tangiers. Their intent was to deny the enemy key terrain from which to stage an assault upon the city.

These bastions were mostly earthworks with timber reinforcement, though a few of the more important ones were made of brick. Eventually the English constructed fourteen such forts, arrayed in depth in two belts. The inner redoubts—York, Belasyse, Bridges, Giles, Cambridge, Fountain, Pole, Monmouth, and Whitby—were quite small and only about two hundred to three hundred meters forward of the walls. The outermost forts—James, Anne, Kendal, Charles, and Henrietta—were constructed atop larger heights at a distance of between six hundred and nine hundred meters from the ramparts. Of these, Charles and Henrietta were the largest and stoutest built, able to accommodate garrisons of up to 150 men, equipped with cannon, and provisioned to withstand a six-month siege. A network of communication trenches provided cover for the movement of men and supplies to and from these forward positions and the city.²

The other English preoccupation was with the harbor, where tricky weather made Tangiers an unreliable anchorage. The trade winds that periodically buffeted the coast could toss vessels against one another; more serious storms might break a ship from its moorings and send it ashore or out into the ocean. The English quickly realized the need for a breakwater to block the aggressive surf. Reflecting the optimism of those early months, Whitehall moved with alacrity. By the winter of 1662, plans had been drawn up, funds had been allocated, and dozens of English workmen and their families were already setting up shop in Tangiers to begin work on the project.

The Tangiers “mole” would prove to be more challenging than anyone had anticipated. Although the material was readily available at Whitby, a quarry just south of the city walls, the environment was otherwise less than accommodating. Deep water and aggressive surf wrought repeated structural failures, requiring multiple modifications and leading to several cost overruns. But the English doggedly persisted, and by 1680 the mole

had reached five hundred meters long, thirty meters wide, and six meters high at low water. Several buildings were erected on it, as well as an artillery battery. It was the pride and joy of English Tangiers and, if not a monument to British engineering, a tribute to that nation's perseverance.

Fairborne had a hand in these improvements, and his steady rise through the ranks seemed to reflect the fortunes of the colony. He had earned several promotions and a knighthood, and in 1676 he rose to the post of deputy governor. Along with a few close calls, including an abortive mutiny and riding into Moorish lines after a deserter, that appointment compensated for what had been a pretty dull career, at least when measured against chaps who were off fighting the Dutch.³ Most of Fairborne's work involved dealing with engineering challenges and the endless excuses of quartermasters.

But the real trials of service in Tangiers were beyond Fairborne's control. For starters, there was London's financial support, which was erratic, to put it mildly. Funds to support the colony came primarily from an excise tax that was part of the king's annual allocation from Parliament.⁴ The funds were never enough to cover expenses, nor were they distributed at regular intervals. The troops' salaries were almost always in arrears, resulting in significant disciplinary problems. Soldiers stole from merchants and one another, and they sold their rations and even their kit to any taker. When money finally arrived from England, the troops burned through it in terrific benders and men literally drank themselves to death. An officer of the garrison, Colonel Richard Kirke, swore "that more men had been killed by brandy than by the Moors."⁵

Officers were not exempt from penury. Fairborne's pay was equally uncertain, which was no small concern to a man with a wife and seven children to support. Matters reached a head in 1677 when a few malcontents tried to mutiny over the issue of pay. At that point, the soldiers had not been paid in more than two years. Fairborne managed to restore order, but he found it harder to squelch the rumors that the cause of these hardships was that he had been embezzling funds sent to pay troops and selling the garrison's supplies on the black market.⁶

Equally vexing was London's half-baked diplomacy with the Moors. The English had come to Tangiers for two basic reasons. First, the Royal African Company, the monopoly run jointly by the crown and leading London merchants, needed a toehold on the African coast for its interests in slaves and gold. Second, Tangiers, situated at the western entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar between the Salé tin corsairs and the Algerians, was the ideal location to support anti-piracy operations. England, like all mercantile nations, was being seriously hobbled by the Barbary corsairs. According to one source, between 1667 and 1680, the Algerian corsairs alone took 153 English vessels, including eighteen hundred passengers and crew. The loss of the ships and cargo, as well as the ransom of captives, was estimated to have cost some £500 million, a considerable sum in those days.⁷ Tangiers offered sanctuary for merchant ships, and it was also an excellent location for Royal Navy warships. From here, one could monitor oceanic traffic, for no ship could sail by the city in good weather without being seen, and small patrols of ships could block the passage at night and during other periods of limited visibility.

These were reasonable aims, to be sure, but Whitehall never condescended to consider the attitude of the Moors to their presence, though they need only have looked at the experience of their ally, Portugal, to know what to expect. Once established in Tangiers, the English government determined that to achieve its goals, the cooperation—or at least the neutrality—of the local authorities was necessary. They also wanted to reduce the burden of resupplying Tangiers by allowing the colony to trade for foodstuffs with the neighboring tribes.

It was sheer fantasy, even assuming that they could find such an accommodation. The treacherous Moors made promises and then reneged on them. The only consistency in their conduct was the demand for English gunpowder and weapons, a trade that Whitehall stupidly allowed. Once that had begun, the traffic was impossible to shut down, even when flare-ups in corsair activity brought embargoes. Contraband trade continued, the most egregious example having occurred several months earlier when unscrupulous Englishmen sold fifteen hundred barrels of black powder intended for Tangiers. That very powder was now in the muskets and mine shafts intended to kill their countrymen.⁸

London's policy toward the Moors was rubbish, but it had muddled along when Khadir Ghaïlan had been the Tangier garrison's antagonist. Though the colony had seldom been at peace with the locals, it had never been seriously imperiled. Only once, in 1664, had the Moors given them a good scare. The English governor, Teviot, had led four hundred cavaliers into the countryside, apparently to clear brush and improve fields of fire along the southern approach to the city. Crossing the Jews' River, the detachment had continued into the hills beyond, leaving the covering fire of Fort Henrietta. Shortly thereafter, upon encountering a Moorish force of several hundred horsemen, Teviot had attacked and pursued them past the next hill mass, called Jews' Mount, and into the scrubby undulating terrain beyond.

That was when Ghaïlan had sprung his trap, counterattacking the English with a second Moorish force of several thousand cavaliers. Joined by the original Muslim contingent, they had forced Teviot into a fighting retreat. Eventually surrounded, the English had taken up a defensive position on the Jews' Mount. When their ammunition ran out, they had fought with musket clubs, knives, and swords. Of the "seven battalions of the best and choicest" of the Tangiers garrison, only nine men had escaped the carnage and crept back to the city—and Teviot had not been among them. In commemoration of his gallant stand, the English subsequently called the mount Teviot's Hill.⁹ Ghaïlan, however, did not follow up on his success. In the end, he was just a warlord without the resources and the organization to undertake a proper siege.

Times had changed, and now the English were fighting a king—and a determined one at that. The Moors were no longer the amorphous rabble who contented themselves with harassing English foraging parties or laying ambushes. From the outset of the fighting last year, they had demonstrated a degree of aptitude in siege craft. Granted, it was rather crude, resting upon backbreaking labor by thousands of diggers, but they got close enough to several of the forts to launch assaults by scaling parties. During a preliminary round of fighting in March and April of 1679, the Moors had isolated and captured several of the smaller forts. The fighting culminated with a general attack all across the line on April 3.

In many places, the combat was desperate. At Whitby Fort, the garrison of twenty-nine men held off hundreds of Moors until about fifty attackers clambered onto the roof of the main structure. Then the defenders retreated to an adjoining tower, blew up the building, and held out for another hour. As the tower finally began to crumble, the Moors rushed in, encountering a sergeant and six bloodstained soldiers. Refusing quarter, the gallant chaps were stabbed and clubbed to death.

At a nearby redoubt, a similar scene played out as a sergeant and twelve soldiers kept at bay another mass of the enemy. When their ammunition was expended, the defenders turned to half pikes and swords. Their numbers dwindling and weapons broken, the sergeant at last ordered the survivors to evacuate. As the Moors closed in, he set fire to the powder store and blew up the position, killing himself and dozens of the enemy.¹⁰

The Moors also showed some creativity in employing a new weapon, a kind of sulfur bomb. Like tear gas, it was designed to temporarily incapacitate an opponent, in this instance English soldiers packed into the confines of a fort or redoubt. “They have found a way of Stinck Potts,” Fairborne described in a dispatch to London, “which upon its breaking makes a suddain flaime and from them proceeds such a stinck that the men are suffocated with itt.”¹¹

When fighting resumed on March 25, 1680, the Moors had employed their tactics to great effect, and on April 13 they came perilously close to capturing Fort Henrietta. A short time thereafter, on April 29, Fort Charles suffered a scare when the Moors threatened to blow up the garrison with an underground mine if the English did not yield. The commander steadfastly refused and the device was detonated, though well short of its objective. Nevertheless the Moors resolutely resumed their tunneling, and a fortnight later they were poised for an all-out assault on both Henrietta and Charles, the linchpins of the outer defenses.

More aggressive leadership might have helped, but Fairborne was frustrated with Governor Inchiquin, who had been in place since 1674. William O’Brien, second Earl of Inchiquin, was an Irish nobleman who had the distinction of being the son of the star-crossed Murrough O’Brien, whose career through the English Civil War, the Irish Rebellion, and Cromwell’s

Republic had resulted in exile. An act of Parliament, however, had restored him to land and title just before his death and saved his family from ruin. Murrough O'Brien, though an unrepentant Catholic, had been a brave and audacious soldier, but his son William was a milder man and far more cautious. William O'Brien's priority was defense of the ramparts—a prudent course, since the Moors greatly outnumbered them. But in refusing the periodic sortie in strength to destroy Muslim trench works that menaced the outposts, the earl conceded the battlefield to the Moors. His lordship was content to support the forward positions with mortar fire, and so the Moors had held the advantage from the start.

Fairborne returned to his desk and looked balefully at a map of the defenses. The outer ring was shattered. Forts James, Anne, and Kendall had fallen, and Muslim trench lines crisscrossed the terrain between the ramparts and the remaining outer defenses. Forts Henrietta and Charles had been cut off from the city since the end of March, so communication had been limited to bullhorn. Troops in Henrietta and Charles were almost out of supplies, and Fairborne could well imagine the conditions within those dank confines. A man scarcely dared to peek into the embrasure, let alone venture out to relieve himself, for the Moors had them under fire from every direction. Now they had a battery of artillery dug into the hill across the Jews' River, a mere four hundred meters from Henrietta, and they had been pounding that unhappy place for the past four days.

Fort Henrietta was expected to fall at any time, and Fort Charles would certainly follow within days. On May 9, Captain Wilson, the commander of Henrietta, had reported that he could not hold out much longer. That evening's war council had sealed their fate, when Inchiquin ruled that a sortie to rescue the men would be too risky, since the entire relief party might be lost. Instead, the earl decided to seek terms with the Moorish commander, but of course the pasha had refused. For the Mahometan, life was cheap. These savages would prefer to have by blood what they could otherwise win by negotiation.

Fairborne poured another claret and pondered his career. He promised himself that if he somehow managed to extricate himself from this

predicament with his reputation intact, he would find a commission in the West Indies. Sugar—that was the thing these days.

What a bloody waste—£200 million per year just to sustain the place, and the still-unfinished mole had already cost a staggering £340 million. The king was tired of pouring his funds into the colony, especially since Parliament refused to allocate adequate financial support for its defense. MPs were grousing that Tangiers was nothing by a budgetary drain, and there were all kinds of fantastic rumors going about. They would blow up the mole, raze the city like old Carthage, and just sail away, or they would give the place back to Portugal or Spain. Fairborne chafed at this defeatism, for he could not countenance surrendering the city to the Moors. After all, Tangiers had been Christian since 1471—and he was not going to be the man to lose it. But the immediate challenge was to save as many of the men at the outer defenses as possible and keep important military equipment there from falling into the hands of the Moors.

After days of bickering and delay, it had been decided that the men at the remaining outer forts were to evacuate on the morning of May 14, at the same time as the Charles garrison. This decision had been prompted by a message from Fort Charles late on the evening of Wednesday, May 12, in which the co-commanders had informed the governor that at seven o'clock on Friday morning, the defenders would attempt a breakout. They requested assistance to that end, and that got things moving. Inchiquin had plans speedily drawn up for the evacuation of several outposts. Where possible, the retrograde would be conducted via the communications trenches. Fort Giles, being near the sea, would have its thirteen men picked up by the Royal Navy. The two outer forts posed particular problems, since they were cut off by Moorish forces in their rear. Henrietta was assumed to be lost; it would surrender on May 13. The main emphasis was on saving the 171 souls at Fort Charles, a daunting task considering the six hundred meters, four trench lines, and thousands of Moors between the garrison and safety.

The plan to support the Charles garrison involved two covering forces. Five hundred of the best marksmen, under the command of Major Boynton, would march forward of the ramparts just after first light to provide close support to the withdrawal. This force consisted of a main body, right and

left wings, and a reserve. They would be led by a group of seventy-two skirmishers whom someone had the gallows humor to dub the “forlorn hope” detachment. The second line of support came from the hundreds of fusiliers on the ramparts, as well as mortars and artillery. At the appointed time, the defenders would make a mad dash for friendly lines. As they evacuated the fort, they were to set off explosive charges to destroy the building and its contents.

Fairborne decided that he did not like the odds. Too many ways for a cock-up. He emptied the glass and barked for his page to come and remove his boots. Six hours until dawn.

As Colonel Fairborne retired for a short night’s sleep, the co-commanders of Fort Charles, Captain St. John and Captain Trelawny, and their men continued with their preparations. There would be no rest for these men. They spent all night setting charges in the thirteen cannon and preparing a mine of stacked ammunition topped by an explosive charge with which they would blow the bastion sky high. Taking no chances with a potential mine failure, the men then destroyed everything of military value, even urinating on the food to be left behind. The activity helped keep their minds off the impending crucible. Trelawny, though, was sick with worry. Quite against his better judgment, he had brought his young son with him to the fort, and now the youngster risked death or worse at the hands of the infidel.

At about four o’clock in the morning, as the sergeants were rousing the troops from their beds back in the city, a terrific boom echoed across the battlefield as Fort Henrietta exploded, hurling earth and shards of timber high into the air. The English in the city probably assumed the garrison had gone up in a blaze of glory, but they would later learn that the Moors had blown the place up after the defenders had surrendered and the military stores had been evacuated. Shortly thereafter, with day breaking, English soldiers from several bastions sloshed their way through trenches and back to the city. Only the Giles defenders failed to escape. With one exception, they were all captured down at the beach. That one escapee, who paddled out to a frigate, was apparently the only man who knew how to swim.

Meanwhile, at Fort Charles the commanders divided their men into two teams; St. John would lead the retreat, and Trelawny would bring up the

rear. The soldiers stripped down to the minimum kit—no powder horns or hats, just as many fully primed pistols as they were able to carry. At seven o’clock, as the close support force advanced through the Petersborough gatehouse, St. John threw open the door and one of Trelawny’s men lit the fuse. In a few minutes, they were clear of the fort and over the first trench line.

The men ran for their lives, the rumble of the mine’s detonation behind them. The ramparts were a blur and seemed an impossible distance away as the men ran at full tilt. Suddenly they were into and over the second trench, with half the distance covered. Chests and boots were caked in mud, breasts were heaving, and the pace slowed perceptibly. Drained of adrenaline, Trelawny half carried, half dragged his son through the gauntlet. The sound of men cheering them on from atop the ramparts was audible now, as was gunfire. Puffs of smoke from the walls announced that the Moors were in hot pursuit.

The covering force deployed and advanced in good order. Led by a Scotsman named George Hume, the “forlorn hope” detachment took up position by the third Moorish trench, the last obstacle between the defenders of Fort Charles and safety. Hume and the others watched in horror as the two ragged lines of redcoats staggered toward them, with hundreds of shrieking Moors in chase, brandishing swords and cudgels, nimbler in their bare feet, and closing fast.

Past the third trench. Two hundred meters to go. The fleeing Englishmen noticed that none of their mates were cheering now. Every man was furiously working his piece, which could only mean that the Moors were gaining on them. No one dared to turn and look.

They reached the fourth trench, the big one—fourteen feet deep and half filled with rainwater. St. John and his group jumped in and sloshed their way across, but scaling the far side was almost impossible. The first man up turned to lend an arm to those who followed, but with each climber, the slope grew slimier and more insurmountable.

Captain Hume and his men were hurling grenades now, and the fire from the walls was a constant din. The unique cacophony of the Moors was upon

Trelawny as he tossed his son down into the water and jumped in after him. He managed to pull the boy to the far side and started to push him up to a waiting arm, but then suddenly they were both back in the water. A wave of Muslim troops had caught up with the fugitives. Shot through the body, the captain was either killed instantly or drowned moments later. The covering party gathered the survivors and returned to the city as the men on the ramparts continued to punish the attackers below.

The butcher's bill was high indeed. Moroccan losses were not recorded but must have numbered in the hundreds. English causalities were far lower but more earnestly felt. As one eyewitness remarked, "Captain Trelawny and 117 men was killed and all had their heads cut off, and I think that every man had a thousand wounds. I never saw such a barbarous sight." Not surprisingly, Hume's group suffered a high rate of casualties, with fifteen killed. The wounded included Hume and St. John. Fourteen of the Charles garrison were captured, as was Trelawny's son, who was fished from the trench. For the thirty-nine who escaped, it was nothing short of a miracle.¹²

Perhaps Fairborne watched the drama from the Petersborough Tower or somewhere else atop the ramparts. It must have been gut-wrenching, watching helplessly as men were run down by these savages, the anguished faces disappearing, the knives and clubs rising and falling. The brave conduct of the close support force and the salvation of a fraction of the Charles garrison was small consolation for a disastrous twenty-four hours. It was the worst day in English Tangiers since Teviot's debacle of 1664.

Ben Haddou, in contrast, was quite satisfied with the day's events. Had he toured some of the captured English positions, he would have been pleased to find a significant quantity of war material that had either been abandoned or survived destruction when the Fort Charles mine failed to discharge effectively. In this latter position, the Moors recovered all of the cannon, which also had failed to detonate, as well as 3,300 grenades. In a rather magnanimous mood, Ben Haddou ordered his men to recover the Christian dead, whom he would return to the English under a flag of truce. Had he considered this earlier, he might have prohibited his men from decapitating the bodies; now he would be obliged to scavenge the heads and send them along subsequently.

On May 18, four days after the loss of Fort Charles, Governor Inchiquin negotiated a truce of four months with Ben Haddou. Both parties needed the break—and reinforcements. Under the terms of the agreement, the area around Tangiers was demilitarized. The English were obliged to evacuate all but three of their remaining forward positions, and the Moors pulled back their artillery. No work would be allowed on trenching or fortifications within the buffer zone. The English also lost the Whitby stone quarry, so there would be no further work on the mole. With his circumstances so altered, Inchiquin needed time to consult with London and decide what to do next. Ben Haddou too needed to regroup, and he could afford to be patient, for the battle was as good as won. All the Moroccan general needed do was to deploy his big guns to the heights overlooking the city, and the infidels would be compelled to evacuate.¹³

The king and Parliament were much disturbed by the news from Tangiers. Inchiquin was recalled to give account of himself, leaving Fairborne to pick up the pieces as acting governor. Before sailing off to London and very likely retirement, O'Brien crated two ostriches, gifts that he hoped would deflect some of the royal ire. They did not.

The crisis finally spurred His Majesty's government to action. Over the summer of 1680, London sent to Tangiers several contingents of reinforcements, additional powder and shot, and other essential materiel. By the time the truce expired on September 19, some three thousand English, Irish, and Scottish troops were crammed into the city.

The following day at dawn, Fairborne marched out in force from the city and recaptured Fort Pole and several other forward positions. Ben Haddou had assumed that the English would remain on the defensive, so he was caught flat-footed. He promptly counterattacked, but the English stubbornly refused to yield their gains. This began a five-week period of charges and countercharges over the ruined forts and trenches before Tangiers. When it was over, the English had regained some of the ground they had lost in May, but their strategic position was essentially unaltered and they had lost as many as seven hundred men. In one engagement alone, a unit had suffered 274 officers and men killed and wounded. When one factors in the injured, perhaps as many as half of the king's forces were casualties.

Colonel Palmes Fairborne was among the dead, shot on October 24 by a sniper while inspecting the forward defenses. He lingered three days, just long enough to witness the return of his troops from their last assault on the Moorish lines. He was forty-six years old.

Omar Ben Haddou's army also suffered grievous losses, probably two thousand to three thousand dead, but the Moroccans could reconstitute their strength much faster than the English.¹⁴ And although a stalemate was less than satisfying, Ben Haddou and his men knew that time was on their side.

By the end of October, a new truce was in place, and Fairborne had been laid to rest in Tangiers. Back in London, many patriots were declaring the siege of Tangiers to be a victory; time would impart a more sober perspective. But even pyrrhic victories will have their heroes, and Palmes Fairborne would have his due. A white marble monument in Westminster Abbey bears a tribute to him. Upon its plaque is a lengthy poem by John Dryden, the essence of which is captured here:¹⁵

Yee sacred reliques which your marble keepe,
Heere undisturb'd by warrs, in quiet sleepe;
Discharge the trust which when it was below
Fairborne's disdaunted [originally undaunted] soul did undergoe:
And be the towns Palladium from the foe.
Alive and dead these walls he will defend:
Great actions great examples must attend.
Against ye Moores his well-fleshed sword he draws
The fame, the courage, and the fame ye cause.
His youth and age, his life and death combine:

As in some great and regular design,
All of a piece, throughout, and all divine.

Still neerer heaven his vertue shone more bright
Like rising flames expanding in their height;

The Martyrs glory crown'd ye souldiers fight.

More bravely British Generall never fell:

Nor Generall's death was e're revenged so well.

Which his pleas'd eyes beheld before their close,
Follow'd by thousand victims of his foes.

The siege of 1680 effectively put an end to English Tangiers, though it would take another three years to persuade King Charles to quit the place. After this round of fighting, another truce, this one of four years, was negotiated between the English and Moroccan governments. Although Tangiers was no longer under siege, it was perilously exposed. Its outer defenses were ruined, and it was still surrounded by Moorish soldiers. Meanwhile, efforts to arrive at a long-term solution, which Ben Haddou was ostensibly to negotiate as ambassador to Whitehall, came to nothing.

The English hung on to Tangiers because of national pride and the king's desire to retain what he considered to be the brightest jewel in his crown. Complicating matters, the fate of the place became tied up in the eternal religious debate in England between Protestants and Catholics. Though Charles, of the Catholic House of Stuart, took pains to respect the sensibilities of the Anglican majority of his subjects, Protestant MPs were convinced that he aimed to suppress their rights and work for a Catholic restoration. Accordingly, they tried to push through several measures to secure the crown and government from the Catholics, including the Test Act of 1678 (which was designed to reject Catholics from public employment)

and the Exclusion Bill (which would have excluded Charles's brother, James, Duke of York, from the succession; Charles was without an heir). Tangiers, represented by some Whigs as a Popist nest, became a bargaining chip.

Since Charles would support neither the Test Act nor the Exclusion Bill, Parliament refused his requests for money for Tangiers. This was, however, mere political posturing. Whig or Tory, the prevailing attitude in government was that the Moroccan outpost was a budgetary black hole, and Parliamentary debates made this all too clear to the king. At the start of one such argument, Sir William Jones addressed his colleagues in the following manner: "Tangiers is a place of great moment, but I take the preservation of Religion to be much greater. For us to consult the preservation of Tangiers now, is as if an enemy were landed in England we should consult the preservation of Guildhall ... Tangiers is no part of England and for us to provide for it, as things stand now, is to weaken our own security."¹⁶

Even when Charles dissolved Parliament in 1681, he was unable to raise the funds to pay for the upkeep of Tangiers, let alone necessary improvements to the colony. In time he came to see the hopelessness of the situation—the horrible state of the colony's defenses, its vulnerability to attack, the difficulty in resupplying the place, and the dubious utility of the mole (naval stores had been moved elsewhere).¹⁷ Finally, in early 1683, the king determined to be rid of the burden, and the sooner the better. The English would evacuate the garrison, residents, and anything moveable, and all else—the outposts, walls, principal buildings, and mole—would be leveled.

George Legge, first Baron of Dartmouth, an experienced naval commander, was assigned the thankless task. Accompanied by Samuel Pepys, an Admiralty official, the flotilla set sail from Plymouth on August 23, 1683. Lord Dartmouth was instructed to conceal the true objective of his mission as long as possible, out of concern that the Moors would imperil the evacuation. To his dismay, shortly after arriving in Tangiers he discovered that the Moors were already well aware of his intentions. Fortunately, they would make no effort to impede his work.

The business was painfully slow, complicated in no small measure by the need to negotiate compensation in favor of the colonists and merchants

whose homes and businesses were to be destroyed. The destruction took far longer than anyone expected. Two thousand men spent three months completely wrecking the mole, with its 200,000 tons of masonry. By November, all civilians had been shipped out, and the soldiers and engineers set to work preparing the demolitions. On the night of January 20, 1684, the last mine was detonated and the English sailed away.¹⁸

Twenty-three years, hundreds of lives, and millions of quid down the drain. Such a waste, especially since it had been evident all along that the place was untenable. Upon casting his first glance at the colony from the deck of the Grafton, Pepys had recorded in his dairy, “But Lord! How could anybody think of a place fit to be kept at this charge, that, overlooked by so many hills, can never be secured against an enemy.” After his first day ashore, he continued, “Amazed to think how the King hath lain out all this money upon it.”¹⁹

The king and his ministers had feared public backlash at the humiliating loss of Tangiers, but the return of Dartmouth and his charges to England attracted little attention. Indifference seemed to be the general attitude. The whit who penned the “Tangier’s Lamentation,” however, could not resist a last turn of the knife in the royal backside:

Of how many Souls and large Punch bowls

Has this been undoing?

How many tons of precious Coin

Lie buried in the Ruin?

Had this been done some years ago,

Of Horsemen and Postilions²⁰

T’had sav’d some thousand Lives the blow,

And sav'd besides some Millions!²¹

Prestige and money aside, the loss of Tangiers was no great blow to England. Twenty years later, the English would find a much better toehold at the gates of the Mediterranean Sea. With the occupation of Gibraltar in 1704, England acquired an infinitely more defensible bit of terrain and a superior port from which to pursue her interests in the Mediterranean. During these days, some familiar names resurfaced, including Sir Stafford Fairborne, Sir Palmes's eldest son, who served as an admiral during the War of Spanish Succession, and Roger Elliot, a former ensign of the Tangiers Regiment, who became the first English governor of Gibraltar.²²

Despite his propaganda, Tangiers represented no great gain for Moulay Ismail. The sultan could boast that he had returned the city to Islam after more than two centuries of infidel control, but he drew nothing tangible from the acquisition, and Tangiers remained a broken and destitute place for the next century.

This period was the nadir for the fortunes of Tangiers, but just one of many twists and turns in the remarkable history of this storied place. Geography was both its salvation and its curse. In the early eighteenth century, when European countries and the United States became interested in establishing durable diplomatic ties with Morocco, Tangiers was the natural choice for their embassies and consulates. By the latter part of the century, all Western diplomatic missions to the kingdom were based here. Accordingly, Tangiers became the epicenter of intrigue between European governments as they vied for control of the country during the final decades of the “Scramble for Africa.”

To defuse these tensions, in 1923 the city and surrounding area became an international zone administered by Great Britain, Spain, and France—to be later joined by other countries. Although nominally the city remained under the sultan's suzerainty, these powers administered it. For the next thirty years, Tangiers thrived as an exotic locale for bohemian living and shady deals. The party finally ended in 1956, when the French Protectorate ended and Morocco regained its sovereignty. The zone was dissolved, and

Tangiers became reintegrated into the mother country. Today it is a thriving tourist destination, Morocco's key transportation link with Europe, and the kingdom's most important port, second only to Casablanca.

Had Moulay Ismail not evicted the English and reestablished Moroccan control, Tangiers might have followed the path of Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's principal enclaves on the Mediterranean coast. After all, from 1912 to 1956, Tangiers lay within the northern zone of Spanish Morocco. As such, the old ghazi's heirs can justly point to the return of Tangiers to the national fold as an important part of the legacy of the second of the Alaouite sultans.

8

THE ISMAILIAN STATE

If a man once falls, all will tread on him.

—Moroccan proverb¹

Terror has come, gone is the pain.

—Arab proverb²

M oulay Ismail liked to keep them guessing, so this morning he decided to be punctual. He would sally forth from the Dar al-Kebîra promptly at eight o'clock. The complex had begun to stir before daybreak, with predawn prayers and work crews being rousted from their pens. At this hour, however, the palace was still finding its feet, except for two Abid archers who were squabbling gently as they tried to skewer a couple of storks that had nested in one of the cupolas overhead. The Abid were not having much luck.

Before climbing into the saddle, the sultan caressed the muzzle of his mount and surveyed the beast's grooming. As he did so, the ashab, or imperial companions, took up their positions at their master's side. These key ministers included the grand vezir, also the governor of Meknes, who presided over a number of secretaries and councilors; there was also the

chamberlain, the man who ran his household and managed his correspondence, and the treasurer. Standing behind them were the superintendent of building, the chief eunuch, and the grand mufti.³ As Ismail mounted his horse, a slave advanced to cover his master with a crimson parasol. With a nod to the chamberlain to his right, the sultan bade the musicians to begin, and the morning's tranquility dissolved in a shattering chorus of kettledrums, castanets, gongs, and horns. Out front, two slaves, one carrying on a cushion the holy Qur'an and the other the Sahih al-Bukhari, led the royal procession, the Sharifan cortege, as it pitched forward. Four Abid pulled open the palace doors to reveal a throng of white djellabas in a semicircle in the courtyard.

As his horse strode forward, the sultan's eyes swept the forward ranks, taking note of the faces as best he could with their eyes downcast. He recognized most of them except for a few of the younger ones, probably sons of some caïd or other come to court for their first view of the capital. As always, heads were uncovered and feet unshod in the royal presence. To Moulay Ismail, this public show of subservience was natural; to many Westerner witnesses of such scenes, it was another indication of oriental tyranny. Thomas Pellow, who was for some months a personal attendant of the sultan, accepted that he had to be at his master's beck and call with shaved head and bare feet, but seeing the same slavishness from ministers and generals was a sight to behold.

Moulay Ismail's horse needed scarcely a minute to cover the distance to a cushioned seat that had been placed before the assembly. As the sultan was showing a more purposeful frame of mind this morning, there was no uncomfortable silence as he considered the white forms before him, no circling of the group, no thumping of some hapless cranium. Ismail promptly dismounted, handed the reins to a slave, and took his seat, lance in hand.

This day's primary business was a report from the governor of Doukkala, a region of southwestern Morocco. Like other regional governors, as well as those of major cities and towns, he had been appointed by the sultan, who required that they appear in person before him every two or three years to report on the state of affairs in their areas of responsibility—and to lavish

him with gifts, of course. Naturally, the governors did not look forward to the summons, the intense preparations, the expense, and the uncertain reception that awaited them in Meknes. In fact, if Windus is to be believed, they found the entire business terrifying. “When the Alcaydes return from their Governments,” he wrote, “it is with the greatest Fear imaginable, as I have before hinted; for if the Emperor thinks they do not bring him the whole Profits thereof, they are in danger of being put to some cruel Death.”⁴

The governor of Doukkala, who was based at the provincial capital of Safi, would likely have been joined by the caïds of the other major urban areas of the region, the coastal cities of Mogador (present Essaouira) and Azzemour. These men were required to account for the state of the economy, taxes raised, government expenditures, security, health issues such as epidemics, and so forth. Those leaders whose provinces and cities were along the coast or the kingdom’s frontiers were also expected to share their views on other topics, including trade, border security, and foreign affairs. The governor of Doukkala, for instance, would have been expected to report on the state of things with the Portuguese enclave of Mazagan (present El Jadida), which was within his area of responsibility. Such was how the sultan got much of his information about foreign affairs. The post of foreign minister did not yet exist; it would be established years later by Moulay Ismail’s grandson, Sidi Mohammad ben Abdallah (1757–1790).⁵ Ismail’s foreign exposure was information cobbled together from his governors, emissaries he occasionally sent abroad, corsairs, merchants, visitors to his court, and influential members of the Jewish community who maintained business ties to the commercial capitals of Europe.

Craven they may have been at Meknes, but in their own domains these Moroccan governors wielded absolute power in the sultan’s name. Like the feudal lords of Europe, they were the ruler’s key men in governing the interior—for the enforcement of laws, in raising troops and supplies in time of war, and, most importantly, in tax collection. These men provided the royal treasury, the Bayt al-Mal, or House of Wealth, with funds to support the considerable expenditures of the state. Doing so required that they cast their nets far and wide, since the three taxes permitted under Islam—the zakat, a mandatory charitable contribution; the ushur, a 10 percent tax on

agricultural production; and the kharaj, an agricultural tax upon regions conquered for Islam—were chronically insufficient. The state’s needs had significantly increased under Moulay Ismail, with his extravagant building projects and large standing army. So Ismail’s government had to aggressively pursue additional income streams, many of them deemed illegal by the ulama, to make ends meet. In addition to the aforementioned, the regime imposed the ghrama, a duty based on individual fortunes; taxes on foreign trade, generally 10 percent but as high as 25 percent for certain products; the jizya or head tax on non-Muslim subjects, namely the Jews; the sultan’s share of corsair loot, 10 percent at the outset of his reign though it would incrementally increase to a whopping 70 percent by the end; “voluntary contributions” from the great men of the makhzen and associations of merchants and artists; and finally, tribute.⁶

The Moroccans employed a system similar to the French affermage, according to which the government outsourced certain public-sector operations to private parties. In Morocco, the private operators were the governors and their constellation of tax agents. The capital stipulated amounts each governor was to pay the treasury, based in part on a rough census and an assessment of harvest, herds, and flocks. Once the taxes had been collected, and the sultan’s portion had been carefully measured and remeasured, the surplus was set aside. This was the governor’s cut, and it could be considerable. The sultan, careful to monitor this practice, did not hesitate to confiscate what he deemed to be ill-gotten gains. All in all, it was a fairly effective method. As in France, the system had the benefit of providing the state with a predictable source of income; whether in Morocco it also reduced the government’s perceived role in revenue collection—a major irritant among country people—is less clear.⁷

This morning, as Moulay Ismail glowered at him and ominously turned the lance over and over in his hand, the governor of Doukkala would begin with the critical prelude—tribute. Cartloads of gifts would be rolled in and unloaded, their contents held up for scrutiny: imported cloth and silks, glassware, the latest firearms, and more. Animals would follow, the choicest horses and camels, herds of sheep, and the occasional exotic offering for the imperial menagerie—lions and ostriches. The governor would study the sultan’s reaction. Was he pleased?

Preliminaries out of the way, the governor would run through economic matters—the harvest, state of the herds and flocks, foreign trade, and so forth. The sultan’s expectations would be high, since the Doukkala was one of the kingdom’s breadbaskets, a region of fertile plains, forests, and a moderate climate. Two of Morocco’s most important rivers, the Oum Er-Rbia and the Tensift, ran through the province and provided ample irrigation for agriculture and arboriculture. The rich harvests included wheat, oranges, clementines, sugar beets, olives, figs, almonds, dates, and more. Abundant pasturage on the plains meant larger herds, and not just of the ubiquitous sheep and goats, but of cattle as well.

The Moroccan economy of Ismail’s time had been reduced to its traditional base of agriculture and the herd, so Doukkala’s production would be of great interest to the ruler. Such was the mentality of the Moroccan state: the city dweller’s view of the countryside as a source of exploitation rather than production. Rarely did any dynasty attempt to modernize or even improve agricultural production; the one salient exception was the Saadians’ investment in the sugar industry. Mostly the government was interested only in the taxes it raised from the countryside.⁸ Moulay Ismail epitomized this outlook.

Taxes on agriculture would have been high in Doukkala, and few would have escaped the long reach of the preceptor. Few tribes here were likely involved in jihad against the Christian enclaves and therefore tax exempt. Those who were, the jayish tribes, were from other regions—typically the Maqil Arabs of the Sous Valley, the Khlot and Safiān Arabs of the Azgār plain, and the Chebānāt and Mghafra of the Oujda area.⁹ Unique circumstances might cause other tribes to be pressed into military service, such as would occur during the protracted siege of Ceuta.

The sultan and governor would speak of foreign trade as well. The facts and figures in the governor’s ledger would probably have come from Jewish merchants in Safi who, like Jews elsewhere in Morocco’s urban centers, did most of the foreign trading. Jews operating from major urban centers such as Fez handled the import business for the Moors, and their people at maritime cities like Safi conducted the negotiations and kept the books. Most foreign trade passed through other ports, such as Agadir and Salé, but

from time to time, Safi experienced some notable activity, perhaps vermillion seeds from Spain or cloth and canvas from England. Moroccan ports received a variety of goods from Europe including steel, cinnabar, muslin, arms, and munitions from Holland; sheets and red serge from France; and potassium alum used in leather tanning, sulphur, and Venetian glass from Italy. From the Levant came silk, cotton, and various spices. Moroccan exports included wax, wool, hides, copper, led, tin, raisins, dates, and almonds, among other products.¹⁰ The fact that wax was Morocco's most important trade article shows just how far the export economy had tumbled since the fall of the sugar industry decades earlier.¹¹

Whether or not Moulay Ismail was satisfied with the Doukkala governor's performance would be answered by the next part of the interview, the inspection of the books. More ledgers were produced and the figures carefully examined. Observations and questions flowed freely, sometimes accusations and insults too. The sultan was predisposed to suspect the probity of his governors, who were ideally situated to have their fingers in the budgetary pot. As the proverb went, he who touches honey is compelled to lick his fingers.¹² The Doukkala governor might have been a favorite—many of these fellows were—but if something did not add up quite right, he would not be spared accusations of gross negligence or thievery. Moreover, the sultan's agents and informants might have provided information contradictory to the governor's report. If either transpired, the wretched fellow would be subject to, at the very least, public humiliation; he might face the sack, lose his property, or be subject to corporal punishment. One never knew what to expect, which may have been part of the plan.

Despite the risks, most governors probably engaged in some creative accounting. Their earnings apparently required a degree of deception, lest the sultan skim their profits and leave them bereft of the resources necessary to maintain their own lifestyles and local patronage systems. According to John Braithwaite, who visited Meknes in the months after Moulay Ismail's death, this subterfuge included some of the sultan's key lieutenants, who naturally expected a cut of the action. Braithwaite claimed to have discussed these arrangements with one of the late sultan's secretaries, a man "who knew perfectly well how to apply Bribes." As Braithwaite observed, "In this Country it is not enough to give the King as

much as 'tis possible a man can rake together, but those who have a mind to keep in Power must bribe his Courtiers to tell the King they have given as much as possible, and more than could be expected; and if there is any way to keep anything for themselves."¹³

After money matters, assuming the governor was still upright, they would discuss security in the province. For Doukkala, this meant Portuguese activity in and around Mazagan, smuggling along the coast, and brigandage in the interior. To the Berber inhabitants of the Sous, the Angâd Plain in the northeast, and the Middle and High Atlas Mountains, their lands must have seemed like conquered territory because of the presence of multiple forts with their garrisons of black soldiers, the confiscation of horses and firearms, and the application of the kharaj. Doukkala, in contrast, would have been a lightly garrisoned province, with a few hundred soldiers assigned to the former Portuguese forts of Safi and Azzemour. The governor probably maintained some degree of surveillance of Mazagan, though this was no more than a formality since there had been no prospect of combat there in memory. Doukkala was a province with no discernible internal or foreign threat.

Crime was another matter. Moulay Ismail took over a kingdom wracked by lawlessness, and he had instituted stern measures to deal with the crisis. The sultan had mandated that each douar, a small village or tented encampment, was responsible for the safety of travelers in their area and the security of their property, and he held each chief personally responsible for compliance. During this morning's interview, Ismail would expect a report on security incidents in the province, and the governor probably presented a rosy picture, or at least an improving one. However, despite imperial edicts, banditry remained a serious problem in the countryside. For former slaves who had escaped or whose masters had died, brigandage was a common lot. Many had been militia in service to the state or its dignitaries, so they knew how to handle arms. Robbing and living on the lam was preferable to begging in the streets or eking out an existence in the markets selling water or trinkets.¹⁴

Ismail and the governor of Doukkala would have also spoken about matters of health. As previously noted, population growth in Morocco was

generally flat due to the twin blights of famine and epidemic, the afflictions most feared by people in an age well acquainted with misery. Each winter, all men great and small—the sultan, shaykhs, imams, farmers, and herders—who lived within sight of the Atlas cast hopeful glances toward those peaks for a providential sign of the coming year. White meant that the rivers and streams would irrigate the fields in the spring; any other color was a harbinger of hunger and death.

As for the plague, there was no anticipating when it might strike, and the only refuge seemed to be the countryside. The pestilence rolled like a wave from one urban center to another, killing without discriminating between rich and poor, young and old, saint and sinner. Moulay Ismail was vigilant about stockpiling grain in Meknes to ward off famine, but there was not much to be done about the plague. The sultan feared little, but he had seen and heard enough to abhor the prospect of so vile a death. In his lifetime, Ismail had witnessed two periods of famine and plague, one as a boy, and the most recent being from 1678 to 1681, during which time he had quarantined Meknes from outside visitors.¹⁵ Despite these precautions, according to Germain Moüette, half of the Abid serving at the palace perished.¹⁶ On the national scale, these disasters decimated the population, sometimes carrying away hundreds of thousands of souls a year.¹⁷ Though Moulay Ismail could do little to deter a famine or the plague, he certainly wanted to know if either was coming his way.

Did the governor of Doukkala pass the test? We have no way of knowing, since there are no supporting records of this or any other interview of such a nature. But the entire exercise makes it clear that under Moulay Ismail, the imperial bureaucracy was held to high standards of personal accountability to the ruler.

Although it may be argued that Moulay Ismail's style of governing had its positive side, the flip side must also be considered. From what we know, his regime's fiscal policies, such as they were, had negative repurcussions on the economic life of the country. For Moulay Ismail, caring nothing about moneymaking schemes, ignorant of even the rudiments of economic policy, and unconstrained about matters of national debt and foreign creditors, the national economy existed only to fill his coffers. To foreign eyes, the effects

of this attitude were all too apparent. Thomas Pellow wrote, “The Emperor and his Alcaydes [caïds] confound all trade in the country, by robbing such as have any reputation for riches. For which reason, the Moors take it as a token that you design them harm if you say that they are rich.”¹⁸

The priest Dominique Busnot made a similar observation. During his sojourns in Morocco to redeem captives, Busnot spent enough time around Christian merchants and Jews that he got an earful of their complaints about the business environment in the kingdom. They spoke to him of excessive taxes and price controls, and of heavy fines for those who broke the rules. They cursed the extortion by Moroccan authorities. Busnot observed, “By such conduct the state is in a strange exhaustion because money no longer circulates, and the Moors are in an extreme state of poverty. All is taken from them, even their lives, when they are miserable enough to come forth for money. And it is stunning with a body so large, that the chief absorbs all, and the limbs, so drained, may not survive long.”¹⁹

John Windus saw the situation from the perspective of the countryside, and it was no less damning of Ismail’s methods. “The Country we had hitherto passed [the Saïs Plain],” he wrote, “is very pleasant and fertile, the Plains in many Places abounding in Corn and Cattle, and the Hills and Mountains yielding plenty of Olives; though a great part lies waste [sic] and uncultivated, not so much for a sufficient number of Inhabitants, but by reason of Oppression from the Government, which makes them choose to live some distance from the high Roads, and seldom cultivate more Land than they necessarily want for their own Sustenance.”²⁰

Even Moroccan historians have written of the negative effects of Ismail’s economic policies. As one writer described, “Correlatively to this intensification of fiscal pressure, there was an increase in the price of foodstuffs. Here and there, one time after another, the threshold was crossed of what the population could tolerate … From this came revolts of the countryside and the protestations of the ulama in the cities, as well as the sharper rupture between the state and society. It was a rupture that could only be aggravated by the manner of raising taxes.”²¹

Ironically, Moulay Ismail's greed produced one positive outcome. The sultan's policy toward the corsairs, his monopoly on captives and the incremental increases on their booty, eventually rendered piracy so unprofitable that it drove many corsairs abroad or to other walks of life. This policy, more than European countermeasures, reduced the threat of piracy emanating from Morocco after 1700.²²

The sultan was also parsimonious, so stingy, it was said, that he denied support to his military forces, telling his commanders to live off the land.²³ According to one account, Moulay Ismail upbraided several officers for their requests. "Moorish dogs," he is alleged to have replied, "be as the camels of my empire who serve me and demand nothing of me."²⁴ Yet it must be pointed out that Thomas Pellow, who served in the Moroccan army during several campaigns, never complained of a lack of resources. His account refers to the army being equipped with tents, artillery, explosives, and engineers for their employment against fortifications. He never wrote of hunger in the camp. Moreover, Pellow was seriously wounded twice and probably would not have survived had the army not had doctors.²⁵ Such would indicate that even if Moulay Ismail's army was not up to European standards, it was not a shoestring operation.

Nevertheless, the greater body of evidence points to a ruler who was grasping and miserly. What was the cause of such behavior? Because we know so little about Moulay Ismail's early years, we can only speculate. Perhaps it reflected an appreciation for the day-to-day nature of life; it may have been a function of his religious outlook, which reduced the country to his personal estate. It was also quite possibly rooted in a fundamental disdain for his people. To a French diplomat who boasted of the peaceful government of his homeland, Ismail reportedly responded, "Your King Louis rules men, whereas I rule brutes."²⁶

For the Moorish imperator, unbridled power was the end and means. As the proverb went, oppressive rule is better than constant sedition.²⁷ In Morocco, governing was that simple. Moulay Ismail's rule was personal, no-nonsense, binary, and bottom line. Those who served him and survived, like perhaps our Doukkala man, did so only because they understood this. They

learned quickly, where their master was concerned, never to be left guessing.

9

THE SPANISH PROBLEM

Poor bark of Life, upon the billows hoarse
Assailed by storms of envy and deceit,
Across what cruel seas in passage fleet
My pen and sword alone direct thy course!
My pen is dull; my sword of little force;
Thy side lies open to the wild waves' beat
As out from Favor's harbors we retreat,
Pursued by hopes deceived and vain remorse.
Let heaven by star to guide thee! here below
How vain the joys that foolish heart's desire!
Here friendship dies and enmity keeps true;
Here happy days have left thee long ago!
But seek not port, brave thou the tempest's ire;
Until the end thy fated course pursue!

—“O Navis,” by Lope de Vega¹

Spain and Morocco, 1681–1697

The seventeenth century was not kind to Spain. A hundred years after the apogee of the empire, Spain was a shadow of her former self. The Spanish Empire still looked formidable on the map, with its vast overseas dominions in the Americas, Asia, and Europe, but Spain had been eclipsed on land and sea. France had emerged as the continental power, and the Dutch Republic was the major sea power. Overseas, Spanish efforts to form a monopoly of newly discovered lands outside Europe, as embodied in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), was also passé. Back then Portugal had been Spain's only competition, but several emerging mercantile powers were now operating in areas that Spain had claimed as part of her New World empire. In the Caribbean, the English, French, and Dutch had all established permanent colonies, and they were in position to menace the all-important Spanish treasure fleet.

A series of ruinous wars had punctuated Spain's decline. The Dutch had broken away from the Spanish Netherlands after an eighty-year war, the Portuguese had overthrown the Iberian Union, and most recently the French had easily beaten them in Flanders and Franche-Comté in the so-called War of Devolution. Spanish military superiority embodied by the *tercio*, the integrated regiments of fusiliers, pike men, and swordsmen that had commanded the battlefields of Western Europe during the previous century, was a distant memory. The cost of war and empire had continually outpaced revenues, and the kingdom had been obliged to declare bankruptcy nine times between 1557 and 1666.

Spain's crowning indignity was King Charles II, the result of generations of inbreeding among the Hapsburgs; he would be the last of their line to rule in Spain. Charles was short, ugly, and lame—a less regal figure could scarcely be imagined. In 1681 he was twenty years old, but one could already imagine him in old age, assuming he lived that long. Prematurely balding (he would be completely bald at thirty-five), Charles was forever

complaining of some malady. His features bordered on the absurd: the trademark Hapsburg lip—a fleshy, wandering thing; a Neanderthal lower jaw; heavy eyelids; and a drooping, bulbous nose. The king was deeply superstitious, and in his epileptic fits he saw the devil in his misfortunes. It was such a sad sight that the people conjured in their king the supernatural. His condition, they said, was the result of sorcery, and they called him *El Hechizado*—the Bewitched.

Charles II reigned at a time of peaking crisis. Everything had broken down, and the empire's fiscal structure was teetering on total collapse. Spain had been over-borrowing since the reign of Charles V (1519–1556), and it was continually challenged to service even the interest on its debt. Despite some tepid efforts at reform, the state was unable to establish any real fiscal discipline; it routinely spent twice what it took in taxes. Furthermore, the country's economic base was shrinking. The kingdom was generally lacking in domestic industry—just textiles, wine, and so forth—so what consumers purchased in manufactured goods were imported from abroad. The bullion from the Americas, which might have stimulated economic growth, passed directly to foreign creditors. Agriculture was undermined by the expulsion of about 275,000 Moriscos between 1608 and 1614 and by the pathetic state of infrastructure.² The Moriscos had been an important component in Spanish agriculture and arboriculture; they were not easily replaced. The roads and transport were so bad that wheat could not get to market, and many coastal and river cities found it cheaper to import foodstuffs from abroad. Commodity prices rose steadily as currency devaluations further undermined confidence in the economy. Taxes were high and fell on those least able to pay. As thousands of shopkeepers and farmers abandoned their businesses, hunger and crime rose to new heights. Nor were the elite spared—even the great houses mortgaged themselves to the hilt to maintain their lifestyles, and great estates were lost to creditors. So many Spaniards simply gave up and fled the country that the population of Madrid dropped by half during the seventeenth century.³

Only one thing functioned as well as ever, and that was the Inquisition. The campaign against heresy slowed, but it remained a popular sport. The people's misery seemed to feed their appetite for the *auto de fé*, the ceremony of public penitence, which was an ecclesiastical answer to the

bullfight. These events were planned weeks in advance, and to garner the required number of victims, the Inquisitors would declare open season for accusations of treason and heresy. For the settling of scores, this was the time. Trials were usually pro forma; the accused were considered guilty from the start, and confessions were often induced with torture.

Preliminaries consisted of a nighttime prayer vigil, a dawn Mass, and a hearty breakfast for the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in attendance, and then the penitence ceremony was held in a public square. The main event began with the procession of prisoners, who trudged into the square like actors in a macabre play, wearing elaborate visual symbols that identified their specific crimes. These miserable souls had no idea of the outcome of their trials or the meaning of the sackcloth and symbols they wore. Their public humiliation completed, the accused were judged and the sentences announced. To catcalls from the crowd, a few fell to their knees in thanksgiving; others wept as they were lashed to a post to be whipped; the least fortunate were herded to a special place, the quemadero, to be burned at the stake.

In the Catholic kingdom, the *auto de fé* was the highest form of entertainment and often earmarked for great public events. For instance, to commemorate the arrival of the new queen, Marie Louise, in 1680, the craftsmen of the Inquisition erected a special amphitheater in the Plaza Major. One hundred and twenty prisoners were judged, and twenty-one of them were immolated along with thirty-four effigies. This *auto de fé*, the grandest in the history of the country, was commemorated in a chronicle in which readers were treated to 308 pages of salacious detail.⁴ Such crude theater answered for the intellectual fire of the nation; it was a sad counterpoint to the bygone age of titans—of Diego Velázquez, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Lope de Vega, Miguel de Cervantes, and Tomás Luis de Victoria.

God would not answer. Only men of vision and energy could save the empire, but at this most critical point, there was only dissension. The Spanish political establishment was split into pro-Austrian and pro-French factions, the former led by Queen Mariana, Charles's mother, and the latter led by Fernández de Portocarrero, cardinal and archbishop of Toledo.

Queen Mariana served as regent until her son reach his majority in 1675, but she was obliged to return when Charles's mental and physical condition made it clear that he was unfit for the job. Aside from his fragile psyche, he was a physical mess. He could barely get about the palace, his gargantuan jaw made it hard to chew his food, and his tongue was so large that he often could not be understood. He was so often bedridden that his surgeons speculated about his demise.

Charles finally found a bride, albeit a reluctant one, in Marie Louise of Orléans, but the union produced no heir—and so the jockeying for power intensified. The queen regent's favorites, the first ministers Nithard and Valenzuela, were driven from office, and the darling of the old-school nationalists, the late King Philip IV's bastard son, John of Austria, attempted a coup. Still the old dowager soldiered on as the government meandered from crisis to crisis under a series of largely ineffectual first ministers and a Council of State that was, in the words of French envoy, the Marquis de Villars, "an assembly of twenty-four persons without spirit or experience." Villars, who had served in Spain years earlier, concluded, "It would be difficult to describe to its full extent the disorder of the government of Spain."⁵

When Madrid had so many concerns, one wonders why she would maintain interest in a backwater like Morocco. Why did she insist upon hanging on to Ceuta, Melilla, Peñón de Vélez, Larache, Arzila, and Mamora? There was no economic benefit to this policy; in fact, these outposts were a drain on the national purse. Trade with the Moors, when it was possible, was usually for livestock and foodstuffs for the garrisons' larders. Was the policy about combatting the scourge of piracy? Certainly not. The Spanish ports in North Africa never served as points from which to suppress the practice. Nor did the policy support long-distance oceanic trade, since the Moroccan ports were too near Cadiz. Ships traveling to and from the Americas or transitioning the Strait of Gibraltar might just as well continue straight to Cadiz as detour to Larache or Ceuta. Indeed, such diversions would expose vessels to greater risk from the corsairs. The reason Spain chose to hang on to this unserviceable real estate appears to have come down to national prestige, as well as a reflexive aversion to allowing any liberated terrain from falling back into the hands of the Muslims. For Spain,

Morocco was at best a distraction, and the more resources they put into the project, the more it became a quagmire.

Better to disengage! But no one—certainly not the weakling Charles II or creaky Queen Mariana—had the vision or drive to change the national policy toward Morocco. The occasional figures of competence, such as first minister Oropesa, were too consumed with managing the various juntas (boards) set up to stem the rising tide of collapse. In any event, such a correction was probably never entertained, since the reactionary faction of the grandes and the church would have prevented any change of course. So the policy was maintained, and violence would continue to characterize Hispano-Moroccan relations into modern times.

The Spanish certainly did not comprehend the Muslim point of view. No respectable Islamic ruler could ignore an uninvited Christian presence in his domain, and certainly not a Moroccan sultan who emphasized his position as Commander of the Faithful. Ever since the Portuguese captured Ceuta in 1415, various sultans and warlords had spent considerable energy and countless lives in trying to drive the Christians from their shores. Although there had been some notable successes, such as at Agadir in 1541, reverses, such as at Mazagan (present El Jadida) in 1562, had been far more common. Moulay Ismail could overlook the Christians for only so long as he worked to suppress indigenous threats and consolidate power; he knew that eventually he would have to earn his spurs in jihad.

When Moulay Ismail eventually got around to holy war, he initially targeted the English enclave of Tangiers. In 1679, the sultan ordered his governor of Ksar el-Kébir, Omar Ben Haddou, to attack the place. But as the English turned back several Moroccan attacks, it became obvious that Ismail's army lacked the engineering expertise to conduct a proper siege. Accordingly, experts were brought in from abroad, and as we have seen, the siege of the following year succeeded in reducing most of the English outer defenses and rendering their position untenable. At that point, Moulay Ismail decided to accept a truce with the enemy, confident that in time London would bow to the inevitable and evacuate the place.

The sultan ordered his general to maintain the land blockade of the English and transfer about fifteen thousand soldiers to attack a new target, the

Spanish fort at Mamora.⁶ This decision may have been influenced by a Spanish deserter from this garrison, who reportedly told the Moroccans of the dire condition and low morale of the troops there.⁷ Mamora (also, Mehdia) was a settlement at the mouth of the Sebu River, a broad waterway that links the Atlantic to the rich Gharb plain and gives access to Fez and the interior of the country. As such, it was of strategic importance, both militarily and commercially. In 1515 the place had attracted the attention of the Portuguese, who had occupied the site for forty-seven days before being driven out by a Muslim army of the Wattasid Dynasty. Decades later, during the Saadian decline, the town became an important center of piracy until it was occupied by the Spanish in 1614. The Spanish built a fortress named San Miguel de Ultramar on a rocky spur dominating the estuary.⁸

Ben Haddou's army arrived at Mamora on April 26, 1681, and he promptly ordered a cavalry charge that drove the defenders from the outer works. With the garrison bottled up in the fort, Ben Haddou placed his artillery to overlook the river and cut off any possible seaborne reinforcement or rescue. The general then sent word to his master, who was probably in Salé preparing a new expedition against Ben Mahrez, that the capture of the objective appeared to be imminent.

The Spaniards were indeed in bad shape. The garrison was small and isolated, being about 130 kilometers removed from the nearest fort at Larache. They had no ships and therefore no means of escape. The defenders were well armed, but they were seriously short of provisions. Under the circumstances, starvation was only days away, so Ben Haddou and the Spanish governor parlayed. The nature of that discussion is speculative, but it likely involved Moroccan assurances of the futility of resistance and guarantees of quarter for the defenders who laid down their arms, as well as assurances for the safety of noncombatants. One fragment of their exchange we do know: Ben Haddou advised the Spanish governor of Moulay Ismail's imminent arrival and warned him that should the garrison fire so much as one cannon shot in his master's general direction, the defenders would be put to the sword.

Some of the Spanish officers favored a glorious exit. Spain had held the place for sixty-seven years, and these Christian warriors were not about to

disgrace Spanish arms by surrendering to the Moors. Others, including the governor, were dispirited and saw no purpose in futile gestures. That afternoon and well into the evening, the officers and the two priests of the garrison went back and forth over their options. Gradually the majority came to the conclusion that surrender was preferable to death, especially since women and children were involved. The next day, negotiations began over terms of surrender, which was the next subject of fierce debate back in the governor's chambers. In the end, the two sides agreed that the governor and six principal officers and their families would be allowed to go free, taking with them whatever possessions they could carry. One of the priests would go with them, and he would be allowed to take away certain church articles. The rest of the garrison would pass into captivity, though their fate would be subject to future ransom discussions, and the second priest would accompany the prisoners to provide for their religious comfort.

Upon receiving Ben Haddou's message, Moulay Ismail rode hard to Mamora, arriving just in time to ratify the agreement. Ismail must have been in an ebullient mood as he watched the dejected infidel soldiery file out the gates. It was a signal victory, his first over the infidel, and it netted him another three hundred laborers for his projects at Meknes. The sultan then struck upon the notion of another quick victory at Larache, so he ordered Ben Haddou to send the Spanish governor there to prevail upon that garrison to surrender. Unfortunately for both Ismail and the former governor, the man in charge at Larache was made of sterner stuff, and he dismissed the idea outright. He then threw the hapless messenger in jail and later sent him in irons to Spain to answer for his disgraceful conduct before the Council of State.⁹

Before he departed Mamora, Moulay Ismail ordered the rehabilitation of the poor Spanish defenses. He added a second citadel inside the Miguel de Ultramar fort, the ramparts were repaired, and towers were added to the south side of the walls. He also constructed a monumental entrance gate on the shore, named Bab al-Jadid, and added a mosque, administrative buildings, and stables. Henceforth Mamora would be an integral part of the coastal defenses of the kingdom.¹⁰

Larache would earn a reprieve of several years while Moulay Ismail occupied himself with other security matters, namely Ben Mahrez and the al-Harran, the English at Tangiers, and various recalcitrant Berber tribes. By the summer of 1689, the sultan finally got around to Larache. Commanding his army was Ahmad Ben Haddou, brother of Omar of Tangiers and Mamora fame. Omar had died of camp fever shortly after the latter triumph, and as recognition of the family's loyalty, Moulay Ismail had conferred the same offices upon his late general's younger brother. Ahmad's war record before this time is unrecorded; however, based upon his subsequent performance we may assume that he had some experience, perhaps at his brother's side. Such would appear to be the case, since at Larache the Moroccan forces demonstrated the same proficiency in tunneling and mining that had been so evident at Tangiers.

A port city on Morocco's north Atlantic coast, Larache is on the south bank of the embouchure of the Loukkos River, about ninety kilometers south of Tangiers. Its favorable geographic position was recognized as far back as antiquity, as indicated by the ruins of Lixus nearby. The harbor was better than others in northern Morocco, and the breadth of the Loukkos offered an excellent safe haven for ships during foul weather. Also, the rocky promontory on the south bank was an ideal location for defenses to guard the harbor and control river traffic. It was here that Larache came into being sometime in the Middle Ages. The Spanish had long coveted Larache for its obvious advantages, and they finally acquired the city in 1610—sold to them by a Saadian prince who needed funds to fight a civil war for the throne.

Details of the siege of Larache are few. The city fell on November 1, 1689, after a siege of about three and a half months. The end came after an underground mine collapsed part of the city wall near the port. The defenders retreated to the el-Qebibat citadel, where they held out for another day and night. By then the garrison had been reduced from 3,200 men to fewer than 2,000. Hundreds were dead, and the spirits of those who remained in the fight had finally been broken. These past weeks they had held out against an enemy probably ten times their number, but no help had arrived from Madrid. So that Tuesday morning, a white flag went up. The Spanish commander asked for quarter, which Ahmad granted. The gates of

the citadel were opened and what remained of the garrison filed out. Those in an immovable state would remain under the care of monks, to either die or recover and eventually join the work gangs. The others marched out onto the Loukkos plain and kept walking east to Meknes. Most would never be heard from again. Only about one hundred were eventually ransomed and repatriated.

The haul of war loot was unprecedented. In addition to 1,726 prisoners, the Muslim forces captured 180 cannon, including twenty-two bronze pieces, with the rest being iron. The largest gun was thirty-five feet long and fired a ball of forty-five pounds. They also carried off two thousand muskets, five hundred sabers, and five hundred quintals of powder.¹¹ Moulay Ismail would put this materiel to good use in the years ahead.

History does not explain Madrid's lassitude at Mamora and Larache, but it probably came down to the chaos of those months. Spain had barely recovered from its last conflict with France five years earlier, the War of Reunions, and she was now embroiled in a new European conflict. In 1688, the Nine Years' War erupted between Louis XIV and a coalition that included the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, the Dutch Republic, England, Spain, and Savoy. One again, Madrid was pouring its limited resources into defending what remained of the Spanish Netherlands.

Capitalizing on his success, Moulay Ismail directed Ben Haddou and his forces against the small Spanish outpost at Arzila (Asilah), thirty kilometers north of Larache. The Portuguese had occupied this port settlement back in 1541 and built a stone fort there. They abandoned the place a few decades later, briefly reoccupied it during their catastrophic invasion in 1578, and then departed once more in 1589. Spain had moved in shortly thereafter. The Portuguese indifference was not hard to comprehend, for Arzila had no particular economic or military advantage. The small bay offered poor anchorage for ships, and the fort was of traditional stone masonry with a proximity to the foothills that made it vulnerable to attack. Amazingly, even after being evicted from Mamora and Larache, Spain continued to hold this useless and exposed place.

The siege of Arzila began in 1691 and lingered into the following year. Eventually the governor, realizing the futility of prolonging the fight,

quietly assembled enough ships to evacuate the garrison and the population, and he organized a deception. One afternoon, he parlayed with Ben Haddou about terms of surrender. The don asked for and received quarter for the garrison; presumably they agreed on a date for the Spanish surrender. That night, as Ben Haddou and his officers were congratulating themselves and torches and oil lamps blazed from the fort, the governor began a stealthy evacuation of the city. With padded oars, long boats ferried hundreds of soldiers and civilians to the waiting ships. By sunrise, Arzila was empty except for a few animals that had to be left behind. If Ben Haddou was chagrined at being tricked, he must have been pleased with the booty. Because of the demands of secrecy, the Spanish had been unable to spike their guns and destroy their military stores. The haul must have been considerable, though it is not recorded. As he had done at Larache, Ben Haddou Islamicized the city, building a mosque, madrassa, baths, and other infrastructure, and repopulating the place with people from the Riff.¹²

Even this third defeat made no impression on Madrid. In the summer of 1692, after receiving a letter from Moulay Ismail announcing his intention to drive him into the sea, the governor of Ceuta, Don Francisco Verona, appealed to his government for reinforcements. He had six hundred infantrymen, sixty cavalrymen, and a mere eighty artillerymen at his disposal. In October of the following year, the Moroccan sultan and approximately 25,000 troops appeared before Ceuta. Verona spotted many black faces in the Moorish ranks. They were Abid, and this was their inaugural campaign against European forces. Once again, Verona cursed the bastardos in Madrid, for they had sent him nothing. Now he would be obliged to press the one hundred and twenty priests of the city into action.

At least the fortifications were stout. Ceuta's defenses were based on the initial Portuguese concept of 1415. The defensive works were at the narrowest part of the isthmus that linked the city with the mainland. Here was placed a massive main wall, the Muralla Real, with positions for thirty or so guns, fronted by a wide moat and connected to the outer defenses by a drawbridge. Beyond lay tiers of outworks consisting of several V-shaped positions and trench lines designed to shield the main wall from assault.

Moulay Ismail had underestimated the challenge of this particular target. Unlike the other Christian enclaves that he had attacked, this was highly defensible terrain. Over the years, several Moroccan sultans and warlords had tried to take Ceuta, but its defenses had never been penetrated. The Portuguese had captured the place by sea in 1415, but Moulay Ismail had only the Salé tin corsairs for a navy and apparently did not give this option serious consideration. His plan was to bull his way through the isthmus, hoping that after three consecutive defeats, the Spanish would lose heart.

This time, however, the Spaniards were up to the challenge. Verona and his men turned back several mass attacks. Muslim troops advancing down a narrow axis of advance were exposed to a withering crossfire, and the results were horrendous. The Muslims could not mine the main wall, for the moat was too deep. After a few weeks of futile fighting, Moulay Ismail quietly conceded defeat, upbraided his commanders for their poor tactical advice, and passed the command of the siege to one of his generals. Then the sultan returned to Meknes to indulge and rejuvenate.

The siege would continue into the next year, and the year after that. The Spanish used this time to renovate the outer works. They built up three sophisticated lines of defense employing the latest concepts of military fortifications, including hornworks, ravelins, and demilunes. The Moors improved their trench lines and dug in their batteries of artillery. A schedule of annual troop rotations was established for the Abid and the tribes of Riff Mountains and the Fez area.¹³ Both sides settled in for a long standoff.

Meanwhile, Melilla emerged as the sultan's next target. This small settlement built around a bay on Morocco's northern coast had been under Spanish control since 1497. Dominating the anchorage was the Melilla La Vieja, a massive fortress built on an outcropping of land on the northwest side. From 1694 to 1696, Moulay Ismail's forces besieged the citadel without success.

To a Spanish government embroiled in a continental war, these North African tribulations were minor annoyances. The Nine Years' War was raging far and wide—England, the Low Countries, the Rhineland, Italy, and Spain—and a French army invaded Catalonia in hopes of reigniting a peasant rebellion that had flared a few years earlier. This strain was too

much for Spain, which went broke again in 1692. Hunger reached Madrid, where twenty thousand beggars roamed the streets and broke into shops and homes in search of food.¹⁴

While the government went into a state of paralysis, Charles continued to confound everyone. The best surgeons, confessors, and exorcists had failed to drive away his demons, and yet each time he rose from his deathbed. The king was on his second marriage, Marie Louise having died in 1689, and still there was no heir. The dynastic crisis was becoming urgent, and the royal counselors urged the king to settle the matter in his will. The queen regent pressed for Archduke Charles, the second son of the Emperor; others, including Charles's new queen, Mariana of Neuburg, favored Prince Joseph Ferdinand of Bavaria; and the pro-French advanced the candidacy of the Duke of Anjou, Louis XIV's grandson. Meanwhile Spanish diplomats and agents reported foreign plots to dismember the empire.

As in many corners of their empire, during these years the Spanish took a beating in Morocco, but they weathered the storm. By 1697 Moulay Ismail's jihad against Spain was essentially over. The siege of Ceuta was still on, though his prospects for success were slim in light of the extensive defensive improvements that the Spanish had made. Nevertheless, had Moulay Ismail known of the political and economic conditions in Madrid, he might have pressed harder, before the Treaty of Ryswick brought the war in Europe to an end that autumn. Thereafter, Spain was allowed to catch her breath.

Few statesmen in Madrid or the other great capitals of Europe had any sense that peace would last. The question of Spanish succession loomed like a dark cloud on the horizon. France and Austria coveted Charles's crown, and other countries wanted pieces of the dying empire. England and Holland were determined to block both France and Austria—the former above all. In their eyes, Louis XIV had already accumulated too much clout; the balance of power was sacrosanct.

Meanwhile there was no sense of foreboding in Meknes, for opportunity beckoned in the east. Although European politics was a mystery to him, Moulay Ismail needed no help in seeing a major strategic shift underway in the Muslim world. In 1683, as Ismail was battling the infidels and his

domestic opponents, a coalition of Austrian, German, Polish, and Lithuanian armies had inflicted a decisive defeat on the Ottomans at Vienna, and they had since pushed the Turks out of Hungary, liberated Belgrade and most of Serbia, and conquered large parts of Transylvania. Never before had the Ottoman Empire been more vulnerable. For Moulay Ismail, the time had come to revive Morocco's manifest destiny in the east and points beyond, in the *aṣ-ṣaḥrā'* al-kubrā, the Great Desert, and in the Bilad al-Sudan, the Land of the Blacks. As the Turkish tide receded, these possibilities appeared to be within reach.

10

A BAD NEIGHBOR

A man with too much ambition cannot sleep in peace.

—African proverb¹

Who stands up with anger will sit down with loss.

—Turkish proverb²

Morocco, the Western Sudan, and Algeria, 1690–1701

One day in late winter of 1689–90, a group of Bedouin-looking fellows perching atop dromedaries loped into old Timbuktu. Observing their sunbaked faces, stiff clothing, and lean mounts, passersby would have assumed the group had just come from the deep desert. Passing the Sankoré Mosque, the city's major landmark, the Bedouins proceeded through the rows of low adobe buildings to the small fort of stacked stones that represented the barracks of the garrison and the headquarters of the pasha. The little square fort dated from the Moroccan conquest almost a century earlier. Though it had been periodically repaired over the years, it remained

the same rustic place as in those early days. Even the pasha's office was spartan, with bare walls and a few articles of rough wood furniture. There was not much point in decorating.

The travelers, an embassy from Moulay Ismail, were from the garrison at Taoudeni, the great salt mine of the region that the Moroccans had recently occupied. This was Moulay Ismail's first foray into the Western Sudan, a broad swath of land extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Lake Chad in the east. To reach Timbuktu, these men had traversed five hundred kilometers of some of the most brutal terrain on earth, including the giant dunes of the Erg Atouila and the arid steppe of the Erigât. Their leader, Sinan al-Ildj, carried a letter from his master accepting the oath of fidelity from the leader of the Moroccan colony along the Niger River.³

The state that came to be called the Pashalik of Timbuktu dated from 1591, when it was established by an invading Moroccan army. The Moroccans had come to conquer the gold fields of West Africa, which the Saadian ruler Ahmad al-Mansur assumed were somewhere along the Niger Bend and therefore within the territory of the Songhay Empire.⁴ When the Africans refused to accept him as their overlord, al-Mansur sent six thousand troops under Judar Pasha across the great desert to conquer this territory.

The Moroccans succeeded spectacularly—at first. Benefiting from a monopoly on firearms, in April 1591, Judar's small force routed the much larger Songhay army at the Battle of Tondibi. Shortly thereafter the Moroccans occupied Gao, the Songhay capital. After another lopsided victory at Bamba, the Songhay Empire collapsed, and Judar became the first of the sultan's viceroys of the conquered province. Over the next decade, al-Mansur continued to pour resources into the pacification of the region, as his officers probed farther down the Niger River in search of the gold fields. In return, the pasha sent shipments of tribute, namely gold dust and slaves, to his master.

After a promising launch, however, the enterprise ran aground. The Moroccans failed to locate the gold fields because they were looking in the wrong places, namely downriver, when the mines were actually in the opposite direction.⁵ Worse still, the gold traffickers who had once brought the metal to the Niger chose to take their business instead to the Portuguese

trading post at El Mina on the Gulf of Guinea coast, so the regional economy, which had been based upon the gold-salt trade, withered. For the Pashalik, this impoverishment of the region meant dwindling tax resources, which in turn compromised their technological edge as a fighting force. Furthermore, the Moroccans could not control the terrain they had conquered, for they were too few and their borders were wide open. The only defensible points were urban areas along or near the Niger River and its key tributaries, including the cities of Timbuktu, Djenné, Bamba, Gao, Kouna, and Mopti. In time, the Moroccans retired behind their mud walls and their sorties grew less frequent. Gradually, the military balance of power began to shift, as the Tuareg, Mossi, Fulani, and other tribes who had once feared the Moroccans began to close in on them.

Years of war, arbitrary rule, and the attendant transgressions and periodic atrocities earned the Moroccans the enmity of the indigenous people of the Western Sudan, but the Moroccans did not particularly care, for they cultivated their distinction as outsiders. Though some of the 23,000 or so Moroccan soldiers sent to the Sudan went home, the vast majority did not.⁶ Thousands died, mostly of disease, and a few hundred fell in combat, but the rest married local women and settled down. Their mixed-race children would be the first generation of Andalusian-Moroccan-Sudanese people, who came to be called the ar-rumah (fusiliers), or simply the Arma.

As long as the Moroccan sultan was willing to sponsor them, the Arma could expect to survive in the midst of a hostile population, but that situation changed overnight in 1603 when Ahmad al-Mansur died suddenly from the plague. The Pashalik had been his pet project, and he had been willing to endure short-term losses for considerations of prestige and to continue the search for the elusive gold fields. Al-Mansur's successors, however, were not like-minded. They had civil wars to fight, and none of them could afford more than a passing interest in the Western Sudan.

And so the relationship between the motherland and the Pashalik gradually dissipated. The separation was a soft one, since the pasha was accustomed to having a free hand to govern. After all, any decision referred to Marrakech took on average six months to receive a reply, but the pasha still served at the pleasure of the sultan. This changed in 1612, however, when

the Arma decided to elect their leader from their military ranks, and the gulf further widened after 1646, the year that the first Sudanese-born pasha was elected.⁷

The Pashalik evolved into a kind of military republic run by and for the Arma. It was characterized as a highly decentralized state, really a collection of city-states linked by the Niger River, with a nominal central government in Timbuktu. As the head of state, the office of the pasha gradually transformed from that of a military viceroy to a governor-general and finally to a figurehead. Generally speaking, the post-Judar officeholders were not particularly effective leaders, being unable or unwilling to meddle in the affairs of the other cities, and those few who did often courted rebellion. A few pashas aspired to greatness, such as Ali ben Abd al-Qadir, who built a new mosque in Timbuktu, married a Songhay princess, and went off to the hajj in 1631. (He was ousted shortly thereafter.⁸) Some even made a mark on the history of the Pashalik, but these were men who were able to leverage an existential threat to galvanize the city-states to common action. For the most part, the pashas were content with their token authority, which included such functions as appointing the grand qadi of Timbuktu and approving the selections of qadis of other cities of the Pashalik.

For the most part, in the decades after al-Mansur's passing, the formalities between motherland and colony continued. Though the sultan no longer appointed the pasha, he at least confirmed the appointment following the election. On Fridays, the ulama of Timbuktu, Djenné, Gao, and other cities included the sultan's name in the khutba; tribute continued to flow north, though in lesser quantities—some gold, but largely slaves and horses; and the pashas referred some of the more important decisions to the ruler.⁹ In short, the relationship was tributary, though largely in name only since the Moroccan sultan could offer no military support to the Pashalik.

At the time of Sinan al-Ildj's diplomatic mission, the pasha was a fellow named Ahmad ben Ali al-Tazarkini, a mixed-race soldier and probably in his thirties. Like all Arma, he was multilingual, speaking Arabic and perhaps Spanish, which had been the lingua franca among the Andalusians who had been the core of the invasion force back in 1591. The maintenance of these linguistic traditions was necessary to differentiate the governing

class from the African masses. By necessity, he would also have spoken Songhay and perhaps another local language to communicate with state functionaries (for the most part Songhay people), his wives, and his slaves.

Al-Tazarkini had been pasha since October 1689, and he was the sixty-first pasha of Timbuktu. Ahmad had been elected from one of the three military divisions, those of Fez, Marrakech, and the Cheraga, composed respectively of men descended from Moroccan soldiers from those cities; the Cheraga were the descendants of renegades, Andalusians, and Turks who had accompanied Judar's expedition or men from such lineage who had been among the reinforcements sent during the following decade. We do not know what propelled al-Tazarkini's name forward in the election process, but we may surmise that he approached this prospect with some trepidation, since support for any pasha was tenuous. His predecessor had been deposed after six months, which was about the norm.

The few histories that touch on the Pashalik provide few clues to the reasons for this turbulence at the executive level of the government. Only the *Tedzkiret en-Nisiān Akhbar Molouk es-Soudan*, the biographic dictionary of the pashas of Timbuktu from 1590 to 1750, provides a degree of detail. The anonymous author of the *Tedzkiret* recorded that a pasha remained in office only as long as he retained the confidence of the chiefs of the military divisions. Outright revolts against or assassinations of pashas were relatively rare. Most pashas were simply dismissed when these men agreed to publicly announce the phrase "Ma Hna fih!" (We've had enough!) and fire a musket into the air.¹⁰ The cause of their chronic discontent can only be guessed—corruption, impiety, military defeat, and natural disasters, such as disease and famine—but from skimming the *Tedzkiret*, in which the word deposed is ubiquitous, we can infer that being pasha of Timbuktu was a thankless task.

Of course, being pasha had its attractions, for the prestige and trappings of the office were not inconsiderable. The newly elected pasha was lavished with a throne said to have been used by Judar, the imperial saddle and jewel-encrusted sword, and a fancy umbrella like those that protected the Moroccan sultan when he ventured from the palace in the Sharifan cortege. The pasha's garrison was decorated with forty-four historical battle

standards of triumphant military units, and he had a bevy of household servants and a bodyguard. Presumably a pasha could enrich himself through his access to taxes and by leading military campaigns, as al-Tazarkini had done in raiding cattle from the Korâro. And when the pasha left office, assuming he lived, the man became a *caïd*, a title reserved for ex-pashas, senior military officers, governors of cities, and garrison commanders.¹¹

Al-Tazarkini had ambitions, and he intended to survive as pasha. Shortly after his election, and before departing on a campaign to the Korâro region, Al-Tazarkini had dispatched a letter to Meknes pledging his fealty to the sultan, along with a modest tribute, with Mohammad ben al-Asri al-Djkani. The details are sketchy, but al-Asri, a Moroccan, may have been a caravan trader who had alighted at Timbuktu and so represented an emissary convenience for the pasha. Some months later, al-Asri returned to Timbuktu loaded down with goods to sell and throwing his weight around as if he was the second coming of Judar. Al-Tazarkini confiscated the man's property and the fellow disappeared. History does not record his fate; perhaps he melted into the caravans or was killed. The pasha then dispatched another emissary to Meknes with his objections to al-Asri. He also requested military assistance in the form of fresh contingents of soldiers and arms, and then he waited.

Sinan al-Ildj's arrival was no small thing in Timbuktu. It had been twenty years since Moulay Rachid's man had come asking for the bay'ah, and—al-Asri aside—there had been no visitor since. For al-Tazarkini, the event was a potential godsend, offering the opportunity to reinforce his position as the sultan's man and perhaps garner some badly needed resources for the country. Such would doubtless have given him greater heft with the ornery garrisons of Djenné and Gao. Accordingly, his greeting of these travelers would have been effusive—tears, blessings to Allah, and multiple passes of faux kisses on their bearded cheeks. Al-Tazarkini probably knew he was grasping at straws, since it had been more than seventy years since the last contingent of Moroccans arrived in Timbuktu. Nevertheless, he placed his hopes for changing this state of affairs upon this apparently dynamic Moroccan ruler.

The pasha knew little about Moulay Ismail or Morocco, only the oral history of Judar's coming and what he had learned from the precious texts that the scholar Ahmad Baba had brought with him from his years of exile in Marrakech. But he had heard the travelers' reports that the Alaouites had unified the land, made jihad against the infidels, and returned to Taoudeni. Apparently, Morocco was back.

To fourth-generation Arma, who pined for their motherland, Morocco was a storybook place and the subject of endless musings and tall tales. They may have gotten accustomed to their surroundings, but they were never entirely at home in the Niger Valley. They considered themselves Arabs—despite the mixed blood in their veins—and proper Muslims, unlike the animist barbarians with their witch doctors and nature spirits. In short, the Arma were a caste of people living in a native culture they denigrated, and their sense of isolation was acute. Thanks to renewed contact with their mother country, they now dared to hope for a return to the glory days of relative security along trade routes, steady caravan traffic, and military reinforcements from home.

The pasha ushered his guests into his modest office and barked at his slaves to bring refreshments. As the men reclined on cushions, al-Tazarkini broke the seal and unrolled the scroll. It was a long, rambling missive, and it took some time for him to work through it. The sultan began by acknowledging his acceptance of the bay'ah and affirming that the Pashalik was an integral part of his kingdom. "Know that Timbuktu is part of, in our eyes, the cities of the Gharb, which is never lacking in men of science, justice, and piety." Moulay Ismail boasted of the conquest of Larache and enumerated the number of prisoners and war materiel taken. He continued, "It is because we know that your city of Timbuktu is also populated with men of justice, and because you as well have Infidels as neighbors, the blacks, that we make you also part of this divine victory that delights monotheists and afflicts the idolatrous Infidels."

Then the sultan deviated into the affair of al-Asri. In his earlier letter, the pasha had written to the sultan of his objection to the fellow being sent back to Timbuktu as some kind of governor, but Ismail informed Al-Tazarkini that such was not the case. Al-Tazarkini was not prepared to accept direct

rule of the homeland, for the garrisons would have rebelled at that. Ismail also confirmed that al-Asri had been sent back to Timbuktu with a thousand mitqals of goods to sell and instructed to return to the sultan afterward with a second load of tribute. Ismail intimated his suspicions that al-Asri had made off with the tribute, requested that the Arma return the confiscated goods, and informed the pasha that part of Sinan's mission was to locate the fellow.

Toward the end of the letter, the sultan finally got down to business—and al-Tazarkini's stomach began to sink. The tone was now one of flattery that bordered on patronizing. "Each of you knows his rank and his duty," Ismail wrote. "This is why we continue to entrust you and no one but you this region, because you know it perfectly well, you live there, you were raised there, and you are acclimatized. Who better than you to inhabit this land?"

Regarding Timbuktu's request for troops, Moulay Ismail replied, "Today, it is impossible for us to send troops from the Gharb to a land situated more than a month's march away, and even less to cause the loss of such soldiers, in directing them to establish themselves on your shores." The sultan continued opaquely, "The army that we would send to you would besides cause more harm than good." What on earth was meant by that? At least the sultan left the door open to reconsidering the request, affirming his desire to "be of use to you." Finally, Ismail advised the pasha to forward an official request for troops.

Al-Tazarkini scratched his beard and reread the lines. Had he not already made such a request?¹² He looked at his guests, hoping for clarification, but the Moroccans just sipped their tea and smiled. Sinan al-Ildj inquired about al-Asri and the tribute. Then he and al-Tazarkini discussed the sultan's interest in slaves and horses, for Moulay Ismail had tasked al-Ildj with assessing their quality. At the prospect of business, the pasha brightened.

However, Ahmad ben Ali al-Tazarkini had little opportunity to follow up with Moulay Ismail. In July of that year, he was deposed after a tenure of ten months. Nor did his successor have time to pick up the thread, for barely seven months later, he too was tossed from office.¹³

Despite his posturing, Moulay Ismail had no great interest in the Western Sudan, which was simply too remote and dangerous to reach. Although he had at least temporarily reoccupied Taoudenit and sent at least one expedition into present-day Mauritania, the main object of these forays was slaves, not new conquests.¹⁴

The sultan did make a more serious effort to solidify Moroccan control over the Sahara region of Tuwât, some five hundred kilometers east of Tafilet, in the heart of the Algerian desert. Sometimes referred to as an oasis, the Tuwât is really a chain of oases that traverses the Gourara region, being strung out along the eastern edge of the north-south-running Wadi Messaoud. With ample groundwater and nearly a million date palms, it was a strategic intersection of several caravan routes and known as the gateway to North Africa. Under Ahmad al-Mansur, the Saadians had established themselves in the region, but their position had collapsed shortly after his death. In 1645, the Alaouites had begun to reassert their control over the area, mainly to collect taxes from the Berber inhabitants, and in 1676 Moulay Ismail continued these efforts by sending the first of a series of envoys. These actions were sufficiently lucrative that, in 1692, he sent a permanent governor, Mohammad Saffar, accompanied by a small contingent of troops, to install himself at ksar of Timintît, the key fortress of the Tuwât region.¹⁵

Western Algeria was of far greater interest to Moulay Ismail, but the reason remains an enigma. Like many of his subjects, the sultan probably considered the region to be terra irredenta. Given the regime's many domestic security challenges and limited military resources, Ismail's decision to repeatedly attack his more powerful neighbor is puzzling. Perhaps the sultan believed the Turks to be vulnerable, even though they repeatedly reminded him not to underestimate their strength. During his reign, Moulay Ismail crossed the Algerian border on four occasions, thrice taking on the Turks and once the Spanish. Each time, he was thrashed.

Obviously Moulay Ismail had little respect for the Ottoman sultan. His attitude toward the Turks recalled the famous interview between the Saadian ruler Mohammad ash-Shaykh (1549–1557) and a Turkish ambassador, during which the Moroccan referred to his counterpart,

Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), whom he regarded as too interested in naval matters, as “the sultan of fishing boats.” Mohammad ash-Shaykh then threatened to invade Egypt,¹⁶ which was madness since the Ottomans were at the height of their power. This recklessness cost Mohammad ash-Shaykh his life—he was later assassinated by Turkish infiltrators among his personal guard. Subsequently, a number of Saadian rulers had to employ considerable cunning to deflect Ottoman ambitions for their territory. Although the Turkish menace had ebbed by the seventeenth century, the Ottomans remained a potent military force in the Mediterranean region.

Moreover, there was the issue of legitimacy, which remained an irritant between the two regimes. Both Moulay Ismail and the Ottoman sultan claimed to be the Amir al-Mu’minin, the Commander of the Faithful. As chorfa, the Moroccan’s claim was spiritually sound. The Ottoman’s claim to be the Caliph, the political and spiritual leader of the ummah, was less so. First, he was not an Arab, and that alone disqualifies him in the opinion of many Muslim jurists. The Turkish sultan’s titles were based upon two earthly considerations: he was the custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and his empire was the principal power of the Muslim world. If provoked, the Turks were still in a position to do serious harm to the nascent Alaouite kingdom of Morocco. Given such considerations, prudence should have guided Moroccan policy toward the Ottomans.

Not for Moulay Ismail. Besides, the Terrible Turk was not so terrible anymore. As previously noted, it could not have escaped Moulay Ismail’s attention that during the previous two decades, powerful forces had been at work in the Muslim world. A coalition of Christian powers had rocked the Ottomans in the Balkans. In 1683, the Turks had been soundly defeated at the second Siege of Vienna, and they were now embroiled in the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) against the Holy League, made up of the Hapsburg Empire, Poland-Lithuania, Russia, Venice, and the Vatican. This sixteen-year conflict of seesaw campaigns in Hungary, the Balkans, Poland, and Russia culminated in the disastrous Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Senta in 1697. As the Turks were fighting for their survival in the Balkans, the Arabs rose up in revolt. By 1699 the sultan had been compelled to accept the Treaty of Karolwitz. It was a watershed moment for the Ottoman Empire, the first time they had been forced to negotiate with the West as an

equal partner; also, in losing Hungary, part of Transylvania, and Morea, the Turkish empire shrank for the first time.¹⁷

With the Ottoman government thus occupied, perhaps Ismail believed the time was right to extend his control into western Algeria, to Oran, Mostaganem, and Tlemcen—areas that had at various times been controlled by Morocco’s Berber dynasties.

In retrospect it seems a harebrained idea, but it would not have been a baseless strategy. After all, except for Egypt, a prized possession, the Ottomans were not particularly serious about North Africa. During the previous century, they had gone there only to counter Spanish moves into Mers El Kébir, Oran, Algiers, Bugia, and Tunis. These territories became the three beylerdeyliks, or provinces, of Algeria, Tunis, and Tripoli, but they were loosely integrated into the empire. Investment by the Porte, the government of the Ottoman Empire, was modest: small garrisons of janissaries, the professional elite of the Ottoman army, batteries of artillery, and some military construction when called for. These assets were primarily to protect key ports from Christian invaders.

This limited investment reflected the only real value of these colonies to the Ottomans, which was as staging areas for the corsair fleets. Other than in time of war, when the sultan would mobilize his navy, the corsairs were for all intents and purposes the day-to-day naval arm of the Turks. The Porte’s policy toward the administration of these colonies was sensibly hands-off, demonstrating an appreciation for the unruly nature of the cutthroats and adventurers—the Moriscos, renegades, and opportunists—who had migrated there from throughout the Mediterranean. For a time, the Ottoman sultans sent governors to these colonies; later that selection was made by the admiral of the corsairs, the reis, and sent along to be rubber-stamped by Constantinople. The Ottomans asked only that their Barbary subjects respect his treaties and rally to the sultan’s banner in time of war. Outside the capitals and a few select coastal areas, the sultan made no pretense of controlling the countryside, so these Berber and Arab tribes remained autonomous.

Almost from its establishment in 1517, the Regency of Algiers had sparred with various Moroccan rulers. Sometimes the spat was about the governor,

the dey, supporting Moroccan pretenders and political exiles; on other occasions it was about cross-border raids. The most acute tension occurred during the reigns of Suleiman the Magnificent and his immediate successors, when the contest for the Mediterranean Sea was at its peak. Twice, in 1554 and 1576, the Turks intervened militarily in Moroccan political disputes. Ottoman forces in Algiers invaded the country, captured Fez, and crowned a client ruler. When they left, the Ottoman sultan and the dey of Algiers believed that they had pulled this last piece of North Africa into the Turkish orbit. To their great frustration, however, Morocco remained stubbornly independent.

By Moulay Ismail's time, relations with Algiers had stabilized and the Ottomans had accepted an independent Muslim state on their western border. The lingering difficulty between Morocco and Algeria was the border, which had never been officially established (and it has not been to this day). By tradition, the Moulouya River formed this dividing line, but Moulay Ismail did not accept this line of demarcation. Like a number of earlier rulers, he appears to have considered some of the territory east of the Moulouya, especially the city of Tlemcen, to have historically been part of Morocco. Dating from Roman times, Tlemcen was an important trading center of the Saharan caravan system. Morocco's Almoravid and Almohad dynasties had controlled the city until 1236, when it had broken away as an independent kingdom under the Zayyanids.¹⁸ Twice the Merenids had briefly captured the city, but they had not been able to hold it against fierce local resistance. In 1551 the Saadians had made an effort to take the place, but they had been defeated by the Turks at the Battle of the Abu Azun River. Shortly thereafter, the Kingdom of Tlemcen had become a vassal of the Ottoman Empire.

A year after bringing to submission the last Berber tribes of Fazaz, in the spring of 1692, Moulay Ismail tried again to rearrange the border with Algeria. This time the sultan was confident of success, even though his first campaign in Algeria, back in 1679, had been a complete fiasco. He had marched on Tlemcen with an army of jayish, and all had gone well until they arrived at the Chelif River, where they had encountered a large Turkish force. It was late in the day, so both sides had decided to put off the fight until the following morning. During the night, however, the Turks had fired

a cannonade and created such a racket that many of the tribes had defected before daylight. Fortunately for Moulay Ismail, the Ottoman commander had demonstrated a surprising degree of restraint. Perhaps he had been unaware that a large part of the Moroccan army had fled in the night. Under a flag of truce, the Turkish general had sent a delegation across the river to parlay with the invaders, and Moulay Ismail had agreed to withdraw and respect the Wadi Tafna as the border.¹⁹ The sultan had retreated in disgust, resolving never again to rely on tribal militia. That is when he began to consider his options for a regular army, a search that would lead him to the Abid al-Bukhari.

This time there would be no tribal irregulars. The sultan's army was composed of fourteen thousand infantry and eight thousand cavalry, all handpicked men, under the command of his son Moulay Zaydan. The objective is not recorded, but it was probably Tlemcen. The invasion began in May 1692. Moulay Ismail initially remained behind to fulfill his religious duties during Ramadan, joining his son toward the end of June. Either the Moroccans moved at a glacial pace or the dey of Algiers, Ahmad Châbane, got wind of the Moroccan plans, for he met them near the Moulouya. The dey's forces were recorded at ten thousand janissaries, three thousand sipahi cavalry, and several contingents of Kabyle irregulars, and the composite Abid-renegade-Arab force was no match. Châbane charged the Moroccans and after a stiff fight drove them from the field. Moroccan losses were heavy, said to be as many as five thousand killed, though that is probably exaggerated. Turkish losses were not recorded. The Moroccan sultan beat a hasty retreat to Oujda, leaving most of his artillery and baggage behind. Once again, Moulay Ismail was forced to recognize the status quo and sign a peace treaty with the Turks.²⁰

Having failed against Tlemcen in 1692, Moulay Ismail tried his luck against the Spanish at Oran in 1693. Obviously he had not conducted a reconnaissance of the place, which was one of the most fortified cities in North Africa, and the terrain mocked the attackers. The city was surrounded by thick, continuous ramparts interspersed with strong towers at key points, and anchoring the defenses were three forts. Tunnels linked the forts and galleries and passed underneath the town to join the inner defenses with outer works in the surrounding hills. The most imposing fort was Santa

Cruz, perched four hundred meters above sea level atop the hill that dominated the harbor. This fort, accessible only by a steep, winding trail, had a stone glacis of as much as twenty meters in height, and it was virtually impossible to scale or mine. Since the Spanish first arrived in 1509, Oran had come under periodic attack, but it had never been taken.

In June, Moulay Ismail once again crossed the Moulouya, this time swinging north and advancing on the coast. The Spanish, under the Duke of Canzano, were ready for them. The sultan impetuously threw his scaling parties into action on July 20. To the defenders, the screaming, barefoot masses might have been bashi-bazouks. And like Ottoman cannon fodder, these Moors too were made compost by concentrated artillery and mortar fire. The sultan renewed the attack on July 24, but he was repulsed again with heavy casualties. Ismail must have quickly realized the futility of the situation, or perhaps he was concerned about the Turks moving against his rear, for he promptly retreated. The Moroccans were harassed all the way back to the Moulouya by marauding tribesmen, and they lost a good deal of their stores.

The situation was humiliating. Unacceptable. Was his new army good for nothing except savaging Berbers? Moulay Ismail was bent on some new success against the Spanish. Shortly after slinking back to Meknes, the sultan repaired to Ceuta, where he hoped to vent his spleen against an easier target. The following month, in October, he launched another all-out attack against prepared defenses, resulting in another bloody, embarrassing defeat.²¹ Larache seemed a distant memory.

As eager as he was to take to the field again, Moulay Ismail had to admit that a pause was in order. He was exhausted, having spent most of the last three years in the saddle. At forty-seven, Ismail was no longer a young man, although he was vigorous for his age. These days he was more inclined to delegate, and he found that his mind was returning ever more to Meknes. His army, too, was spent; he had lost thousands of experienced soldiers, many of them Abid, and his armory was badly depleted. And so Moulay Ismail returned to his beloved Meknes, much to the disappointment of the courtiers whose extended holiday ended with his arrival. It would be more than seven years before the sultan's "tawney Nurseries" could churn out

enough replacement warriors and his agents could procure sufficient firearms and powder for the army.

By the spring of 1701, the sultan was once again ready to pounce. By then, the Ottomans were in a particularly rough spot. After the humiliation of the Treaty of Karolwitz, political factionalism and scheming in Constantinople had reached the point that Sultan Mustapha II retreated to the former capital of Edirne. Cloistering himself more than two hundred kilometers from the capital, the sultan ceded a large degree of authority to his chief adviser, Feyzullah Efendi. This obsequious fellow had much ambition, and soon he was stacking the imperial bureaucracy with relatives and cronies. This nepotism, combined with a new financial crisis, dispirited the civil service. People spoke of another round of debasements, or the reduction of the specie content of currency that was the treasury's time-honored way of coping with currency shortages. The janissaries were angry at the country's defeat and resentful of the whispers that they had failed in their duty.²² It was a time of unreality for the Ottomans—one of despondency, anger, and fear.

Unfortunately for Moulay Ismail, the turmoil in Constantinople apparently had no impact in Algiers, nor did the fact that his old nemesis Ahmad Châbane was dead, assassinated some time earlier at a mosque in Algiers. Alerted to Moroccan movement across the frontier, the new dey, Hajj Mustapha, marched out of Algiers with his devil janissaries. On April 28, the Turks smashed the Moroccans again at a place called Hajj-Bou R'azi, on the banks of the Djedioua River, a tributary of the Chelif River. The Turks took three thousand heads and a large quantity of booty.²³

With that, the old ghazi finally gave up on western Algeria. It seemed as unattainable as the Western Sudan.

11

A DUBIOUS COURTSHIP

It is legal because I wish it.

—Louis XIV¹

Allah has given me a kingdom, and no one can take it away.

—Moulay Ismail²

France and Morocco, 1681–1699

Versailles Palace was particularly picturesque on a crisp October morning in 1681, with the beech and poplar trees at the height of their color. The rider's horse cantered from under the autumn canopy and onto the gravel courtyard. Soon the content of his satchel was being borne through the galerie des glaces on a silver tray in the hands of a liveried footman. The seventy-three meters allowed the fellow a few sidelong glances at the workmen. One group of men was busy placing mirrors into one of the splendid arches to his left; when completed, the seventeen arches would be filled with 357 mirrors that reflected the light from the massive windows on

the opposite side of the corridor. Above, on a scaffold, the great artist Charles Le Brun was at work on a tableau on the vaulted ceiling, this one apparently of the Peace of Nijmegen. The three massive crystal chandeliers nearest to him were lit, each with twenty long, white candles. Despite the deference for sunlight, the hall could be quite dark, depending upon the time of day and the weather. As the footman exited the great hall, two guards recognized him and pulled open the gilded doors to the Salon of Apollo.

As was his custom, King Louis XIV was in the midst of his morning consultation with his ministers, listening at the moment to his finance minister, the shaggy-haired Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Under his usual carapace of white powder and towering, leonine wig of jet-back faux cheveaux, the king reclined on a settee, one silk-sheathed leg resting on the other as he slowly turned his gilt staff. The conversation was about the kingdom's financial footing for war. Such was occasioned by the French occupation, on September 30, of the Imperial Free City of Strasbourg. Tensions across Europe were running high.

The footman stopped two paces from the chamberlain. After a few moments, the latter extended his right hand. The tray was brought near, a bow was proffered, and the footman withdrew. The chamberlain opened the portfolio and scanned the contents, two letters of one page each. One page was filled with the unintelligible squiggle of Arabic writing, some of it written sideways in the margins, and topped by a seal of ink; the other was a French translation of that text. The chamberlain's brow wrinkled in surprise, for this was the second such letter in as many days. In the first one, the Moroccan sultan had announced the coming of his ambassador; on this occasion, the missive was a good deal longer and more complicated. But since the king insisted upon all foreign correspondence being read to him, no matter how mundane, he closed the folder and placed it on the side table next to the settee.

At some point during that morning's affairs, Louis reached for the portfolio. One can imagine the king's incredulity as he read and reread the translation of the amazing epistle. For a few moments, the mood of the chamber

lightened, and tears of laughter must have ruined the makeup of more than one visage. Moulay Ismail had written as follows:

To Heraclius, emperor of the Romans, peace be upon he who follows the right path!³

I exhort you to observe the prayers and convert to Islam. Submit to the Islamic religion, and you will be saved. Allah will reward you twice. Should you refuse, you will commit a great crime. However, do as you please. And you gentlemen of the Old and New Testaments, agree with us, according to the Text that we adore and in believing in a single God, and accepting none other than Him, and in believing nothing equal to Him and having no other master but him. And, to those who shrink back and do nothing, we tell them, “Bear witness that we are Muslims!”

I do not know if you are of the race and line of this Heraclius of whom I speak, and if this letter of our Prophet reaches you, let it be the same scripture and the same words and meaning, and let us know if you have it near you.

I invite you to come to our religion, such is encouraged by our amicable Prophet, Lord of the true direction and path. I am obliged to tell you so. Whether you do so or not, it is up to you to think it over. That being so, you deserve everything written in the letter from our Prophet, peace be upon him.⁴

And so developed an improbable flirtation between two of the most absolute rulers of their time. Over the next two decades, Moulay Ismail and

Louis XIV would exchange numerous letters and several emissaries in search of a treaty. Their relations alternated between hostility and détente, but in the end, their long discourse led nowhere.

Such was probably fated from the start. France and Morocco had little interaction during the Early Modern period, politically or economically, and there was little to impel them to look beyond their parochial interests to common action. One exception might have been the siege of Larache in 1689. The Moroccan historian al-Nāṣirī wrote of a Spanish source who mentioned that Louis had provided a flotilla of ships to isolated Larache. Although this is plausible, since France and Spain had been at war since March of that year, it is also dubious in that Morocco and France had no treaty between them; moreover, the presence of this flotilla at Larache is not corroborated by other sources.⁵

It is a pity that Moulay Ismail and Louis XIV were unable to find common cause. Our history is poorer for it, for theirs would have been an intriguing partnership. Apart from their very different temperaments, Ismail and Louis had much in common. Both sat atop volatile states, and to ensure their power, they had to establish and vigilantly carry out a system of personal rule. In France, as in Morocco, powerful forces were opposed to centralized government. As we have seen, Moulay Ismail had the tribes, chiefly the Berbers, with which to contend; he also had to deal with the Sufi brotherhoods and the ulama of Fez. Ismail's method of maintaining his power was a combination of the prosaic (political legitimacy through his claim of chorfa) and the extraordinary (direct and sustained military pressure).

Louis's methods were not dissimilar. In his early years Louis had allowed his powerful first minister, Cardinal Mazarin, to govern in his name, but after Mazarin's death in 1661, Louis determined to assume the lead, so he became his own first minister. Several factors shaped this desire, but ultimately it was a matter of trust. Louis never forgot the Frondes, the two periods of revolt—the first by the Parlement (courts) of Paris in 1648, followed in 1650 by the uprising by a group of nobles. He had been a lad of ten when the troubles began, but he vividly remembered the chaos of civil war, barricades in the streets of Paris, Marazin's flight into (temporary)

exile, a countryside scored by the forces of Turenne and Condé, and the ever-changing place mat of princely armies. As king, Louis responded to any challenge to his royal authority with a two-pronged approach: developing a kind of cult of personality, and building a standing army that ensured that no prince or group of nobility could successfully challenge him on the battlefield.⁶

No ruler of this age devoted more attention to his image than Louis XIV, who was determined to celebrate his gloire through a dazzling court and to promote in ways both large and small the notion of his being a near deity. The Versailles Palace was center stage, and everything about its massive, gaudy construction and serene gardens was meant to awe. In previous eras, great constructions had usually been dedicated to the glory of God, but Versailles was a statement of the greatness of the French king. The fact that the king built the palace in the open, without a single nod to military fortifications, spoke volumes about his confidence. No one would dare to attack a paragon of noble blood appointed to rule by God on high. Besides, the king had a powerful army to take on all comers.⁷

Quotidian routine reinforced the royal myth. The events of the day—the king's lever, dîner, souper, and coucher—were elaborate dramas during which nobles, clergy, courtiers, and servants vied for royal notice and favor. Who slipped on the king's shoes in the morning and who held his candle in the evening were serious matters.⁸ The royal gaming table, the hunts, and the trips to Fontainebleau and Saint-Germain were prized occasions for the toadying class. At court, protocol was elevated to an art form. Manners and clothing defined the bloodline: the greater the flourish, the greater the man. It was a carnival of pomposity, and its underlying purpose was to ensure that Louis shone above all mortals.

Though it was not Louis's intent, his excess set the tone for European culture for the next 120 years. Courts as far away as Saint Petersburg imitated everything, starting with fashion. The effeminate male costume was all the rage—the leonine wig, lace collar, formfitting hose, all the way down to the buckled shoes. Women's fashion, even more impractical, was defined by tightly corseted waists, puffy underskirts open in the front and looped in the back, painted birthmarks, copious white powder, towering

hair, and ample perfume. Jewels were everywhere, in tiaras, buttons, shoes, and hats. In all matters of culture, France reigned supreme. Molière was the model in theater, Jean-Baptiste Lully in music, Le Brun in painting, and François Mansart in architecture.⁹ Louis's grand achievement at Versailles would be widely imitated at chateaus across Europe—at Vienna, Potsdam, Dresden, Munich, and Saint Petersburg.¹⁰

The French army would also serve as a model for the future. In this, Louis owed much to François Michel Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois, his long-serving secretary of state for war. Louvois was instrumental in building a large, well-equipped French standing army that was loyal to the king alone. Again, there is an obvious parallel with Moulay Ismail, who detached himself from local dependencies for military forces through the creation of his Abid al-Bukhari.

Both rulers maintained mastery over their country's religious structure, though neither achieved absolute control. Moulay Ismail's supremacy was enshrined in his role as Commander of the Faithful, although his will was sometimes challenged by the ulama of Fez, as we have seen in the creation of the Abid. Louis supplanted the pope in ecclesiastical appointments and regulated abbeys and convents, thereby achieving control over the Catholic church in France.¹¹ His influence over the religious life of the country was further advanced with his suppression of the Huguenots, the French Protestants. On October 19, 1685, the king revoked the Edict of Nantes, through which, in 1598, Henry IV had extended toleration to the Protestants. With this policy reversal, Louis determined that Protestant churches were to be razed, their ministers were given two weeks to leave the country, and newborns were to be baptized as Catholics. Though a popular act at the time, in the long run the revocation turned out to be a disaster for France, because approximately 300,000 Huguenots left the country. Even for a country of twenty million people, their departure was hard felt, as many of those who fled were of the small middle class—merchants, skilled craftsmen, and farmers. Many areas of the country, especially in the southwest, were virtually depopulated.¹²

Another common trait between the Moroccan and French monarchs was a desire for knowledge over all aspect of their governments, and both rulers

employed networks of informers and spies. As has been discussed, Moulay Ismail brought his governors back to court every year or two to give an accounting of their affairs; however, thanks to his informants, he probably had the answers to his questions well in advance. Louis could rely on his intendants, civil servants—officials selected by the king and assigned by him to their posts in the provinces. This sixteenth-century innovation provided the king with a parallel power structure by which to bypass traditional local authorities; the institution also served as a conduit of information about conditions in the countryside. Finally, both men insisted upon personally reading their correspondence. They wanted to know as much as possible about affairs beyond the court, because, in Louis's words, an ill-informed man “cannot fail to reason faultily.”¹³

The most obvious similarity between Moulay Ismail and Louis XIV was their passion for building. As we have seen, the Moroccan sultan transformed sleepy little Meknes into a great capital, and his building spree continued until his death. So it was with Louis XIV, who spent most of his reign—until the end of his life—attending to his vision, the conversion of his father's hunting lodge outside Paris into the grandest palace in all Europe. Both monarchs took a personal interest in all aspects of design and construction, and everything passed before them for approval. If a bit of completed work did not please, it was effaced and rebuilt. No expense was spared. We have no idea of the cost of the Moroccan enterprise, since no records survived. Versailles, with its 2,300 rooms and 63,000 square meters, cost nearly twenty-six million livres—an enormous sum, but not enough to bankrupt the state, as has sometimes been suggested, since France took in between eighty-five and ninety million livres per year.¹⁴

Perhaps these similarities created a degree of empathy between the two leaders. Of Louis's attitude toward his Moroccan counterpart, we know nothing. Certainly he read the reports and accounts of his emissaries and perhaps those of people such as Germain Moüette, so his impression of his Moroccan sultan must have been colored by these sanguinary tales. More apparent was Moulay Ismail's interest in his French counterpart, as we know from the testimony of Abdallah Ben Aïsha, to which we shall return.

Moulay Ismail's interest in Louis XIV probably began with the stories he heard from his nephew, Moulay el-Arbi. The latter had fled Morocco around 1670, after family infighting threatened his life, and sought service with the Spanish. For the next five years he served with the Spanish army in Italy and in Flanders. The extent of El-Arbi's firsthand information is unclear, but he was in on the French invasion of the Low Countries during the Dutch War. Camp life certainly would have provided him with much information about European affairs and the preeminent king of them all, Louis XIV. When he discovered that his uncle had assumed the throne, the homesick el-Arbi determined to make his way back to Morocco.

Moulay Ismail welcomed his nephew back, and he was delighted to hear all about the bizarre place that was Europe. He was appalled by the state of a thousand states, the Holy Roman Empire, whose sovereign, Leopold I, had to negotiate with his lords to have an army. He was fascinated by the Dutch, who flooded their own country to stop the French armies. He was perplexed by the English, who hated the pope yet permitted themselves to be ruled by a Catholic king, like the Hindus of India with their Mogul prince. And, of course, he heard about the great king of the Franks, the man who led his armies to victory after victory over a host of enemies; a man whose grandeur was envied and despised, yet set the tone in all things for Europe —le Roi Soleil, Louis XIV.

For Ismail, the fact that Louis was the enemy of the English and the Spanish, two powers who occupied Moroccan territory, was no small consideration. Some historians have also cited France's flirtation with the Ottoman Empire as proof of French amitié for Muslim countries. For some time, the two powers had been informal allies of convenience, since they shared an enemy in the Hapsburgs, but this relationship was of no consequence to Moulay Ismail. The Great Turk was no friend to Morocco. In fact, with the possible exception of Spain, no nation inspired greater animus in the makhzen than the Turks.

Moulay el-Arbi's stories helped pique the sultan's curiosity about the French king, the first foreign leader who had reached out to him. Shortly after Moulay Ismail assumed the throne, he received a letter from Louis announcing the arrival of an ambassador who would be charged with

negotiating a prisoner exchange. The fact that the letter was virtually identical to that sent months earlier to Moulay Rachid could not have flattered the new ruler. As both letters suggested, the French interest in Morocco owed itself entirely to the Salétin corsairs. France, like all nations of Western Europe, had for generations suffered from the pestilential Barbary corsairs. Paris had tried threats, bribery, and sometimes direct blockade and bombardment of the Barbary ports, but to no avail. Most recently, in 1680, Louis had sent a flotilla under Françoise Louis de Rousselet, Marquis de Château-Renaud, against Salé. His three warships, two frigates, and a fire ship blockaded and bombarded the port, but they were unable to do serious damage and eventually withdrew.

After this failure, the French Council of State determined on a fresh diplomatic effort. The next year, Château-Renaud and his fleet were back, but this time to negotiate a peace treaty with the Moroccan ruler. In charge of this diplomatic mission was Lefebvre de La Barre. Having had previous dealings with Omar Ben Haddou, the sultan's man in the Gharb, Château-Renaud steered La Barre in that direction. They tracked Ben Haddou down at Mamora, where he was seeing to the refurbishment of the former Spanish fort. On July 13, 1681, the two sides signed a treaty of sixteen articles that was to go into effect following ratification by each monarch. Upon receiving the text, however, Louis refused to associate himself with the document, saying it would be "a rather shameful peace."¹⁵

In contrast, Moulay Ismail was eager to seal the deal with France. In 1681, his position was far from secure: Ben Mahrez was still at large; the English remained at Tangiers; the Spanish held Larache, Ceuta, Peñón de Vélez, and Melilla; the Portuguese clung to Mazagan; and the Berbers of the Atlas were not yet subdued. Ismail was up to his neck in enemies and needed military supplies—and support too, if he could get it. The sultan determined to send an embassy under Mohammad Temim to Paris to reach an agreement with the French.

The Moroccan delegation departed from Tétouan and sailed to Brest, arriving on October 17. During the weeks that followed, Colbert de Croissey, the French secretary of state for foreign affairs, and Jean-Baptiste Albert Colbert, the French secretary of the navy, assembled a treaty of

twenty clauses for Temim's signature. The Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye was a remarkable document, the kind of agreement written by the victor for the vanquished, for it included a host of one-sided demands. Under the treaty, the Moroccans would be required to defend French ships taking shelter in their harbors from Algerian and Tunisian corsairs; liberate all Frenchmen captured by the enemies of France, including these same foreign corsairs should they come onto Moroccan soil; and assist French vessels shipwrecked on their shores. Furthermore, the French king would be permitted to establish consuls wherever he deemed necessary in Morocco. Under the agreement, the Moroccans would be afforded none of the same courtesies.¹⁶

This business must have come as quite a surprise to Temim, for whom the indignities of the recent past had almost been forgotten. First there had been the fifty-five-day wait in Brest amid the incalculable miseries of a cold and rainy Breton autumn. When they had finally been cleared to proceed to the capital, there had followed a three-week ordeal of coach travel, with Temim and his men swaddled like babies against the cold and jostled over awful country roads. The Frenchmen who had accompanied them—a couple of diplomats, an interpreter, and a contingent of mounted lancers—had not been cordial traveling companions. Their mood had been soured from the start by the menagerie Temim had brought as gifts for the king: a lion, a lioness, a panther, and four ostriches. Had it not been possible, the Frenchmen groused, to send something plus pratique, something that did not require food and shelter at night? The French had been obliged to arrange barges for the creatures, which had then been transported up the River Seine. Upon their long-awaited arrival at the gates of Paris, Temim and his men had been kept waiting for three days in a modest auberge before being allowed entry to the capital. None of this had been easy for Temim, a man in his fifties and perhaps older, who had probably never set foot outside his own country.

But those tribulations had all been forgotten in the cultural whirlwind of Paris, where Temim had been received in grand style, put up in the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, and attended by a dozen footmen. He had been received by the king with great cordiality and toured Versailles, the Tuilleries, Notre Dame, the royal library, and the Observatory of the Louvre. He had

attended the opera, ballet, and the *Comédie italiénne*,¹⁷ and each night had been a different glittering soirée with the beautiful set of Paris. Temim had been particularly enchanted by the ladies of the court, who dazzled him with their bosoms, painted faces, wild billowy clothing, and bejeweled hair. Of course, it had taken him more than one evening to get used to seeing women in such surroundings, and he had almost fled the salon the first time one of them had engaged him in conversation. Fortunately, the king's interpreter, Pierre Dipy, had been at his side to explain. But then Temim had been surprised at how readily he became accustomed to the queer practice of mingling with these women—it was all really quite fascinating.

But that was then. Cold reality set in on January 29, 1682, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, as Mohammad Temim and his little entourage of six sat in stony silence and listened to Dipy read the treaty. So much for friendship with the Franks.

It had been a long and fretful return to Morocco, for Temim knew that his master would be most displeased with the failure of the mission. Much to Temim's relief, however, Moulay Ismail turned out to be more interested in hearing about the curious culture of the Franks. Temim and his deputy, Ali Mañino, spent several days in Meknes recounting their experiences and responding to the sultan's many questions. The sultan was obviously intrigued, perhaps even impressed, with the tales of grandeur of Europe's most glittering court.

Moulay Ismail must have been amused by Louis's sexual shenanigans, about which Temim could not have failed to hear the gossip. The king's roving eye was a constant source of chatter, and his flouting of Catholic mores on marriage and sexuality was the proverbial elephant in the room at court. Temim would have learned that the Great King had to maintain appearances with his wife, Marie-Thérèse of Spain, while at night he tiptoed to the boudoirs of a series of lovers, including, among others, Louise de la Vallière, Mademoiselle de Fontages, and Madame de Montespan. These liaisons produced several illegitimate children and much subterfuge. To Moulay Ismail, who had no such constraints, it all must have seemed quite silly.

Louis had sent a letter with Temim, encouraging Moulay Ismail's ratification of the treaty, but the sultan temporized. Although we do not know his attitude toward many elements of the treaty, we do know of his insistence on the "head-for-head" captive exchange. The French position, established by La Barre at Mamora, remained consistent: the French king insisted upon being able to purchase his subjects held in Moroccan captivity for three hundred livres each. It was typical of the Gallic concept of reciprocity, or lack thereof. Acceptance on Moulay Ismail's part would have meant consigning forever his subjects in French captivity to the galleys of Toulon, and this he refused to accept. Moroccan historians make Moulay Ismail look like a humanitarian for sticking to his guns, but his stubbornness on this point was more likely just one aspect of a bigger picture. As the Moroccans liked to say, "He who does not respect you, insults you."¹⁸ The sultan wanted to be treated as an equal, which started with reciprocity on the repatriation of captives.

The French were not ready to give up. The following year, Louis sent the Baron of Saint-Amand to Meknes to demand the ratification of the treaty, and the baron almost succeeded. Although Moulay Ismail at first stonewalled the Frenchman, at the last minute the sultan offered to accept the treaty, but with one proviso—a head-for-head captive exchange. Saint-Amand was not authorized to make such a concession, so the mission came to nothing, except for the liberation of twenty French captives that Ismail made as a gift to Louis. Franco-Moroccan relations soon soured following a series of incidents on the high seas, mainly corsair activity, that led to a French trade embargo of Morocco from 1687 to 1688.

At the same time, Louis's attention was focused on a new European crisis. For years, French foreign policy had been centered on breaking out of Hapsburg encirclement and establishing more defensible frontiers in the Spanish Netherlands and the Sarre-Moselle-Rhine region, and such had been behind the War of Devolution (1667–1668) and the Dutch War (1672–1678). To thwart renewed French expansionism, in 1686 Emperor Leopold I organized the League of Augsburg with the kings of Sweden and Spain and the electors of Bavaria, Saxony, and the Palatinate. Undeterred, Louis saw an opportunity and invaded the Rhineland in 1688, though hoping for a speedy resolution since his finances were in a pinch. He also was eager to

encourage the Turks, who were reeling from military defeats in the Balkans, to fight on against the Emperor. But Louis had miscalculated when he assumed the Dutch would be preoccupied with their planned invasion of England. The Germans slowed the French advance in the Rhineland, and the Imperial forces were soon reinforced by troops from Hungary. In what was dubbed the Glorious Revolution, William of Orange easily took London and chased Louis's ally, James II, into exile. Instead of a quick victory, Louis found himself confronted by a grand coalition and a protracted military conflict, which was to become known as the Nine Years' War (1688–1697).

To add to his woes, in 1685, at age forty-seven, Louis's health had begun to decline. It began as gout, a common enough ailment, but then the king endured a botched tooth extraction that led to an abscess. The following year, he suffered an abscess in his lower body where thigh and buttocks meet. But these were all minor ordeals when compared with the anal fistula Louis developed in 1686, which required several painful operations. It was not until March of the following year that he had fully recovered.¹⁹

Amidst all these headaches, Louis somehow found the energy to dispatch another emissary to Morocco in 1688, but Des Augiers, too, returned empty-handed. As before, the sticking point was captives. However, not every Western nation was banging its head against this Ismailian wall. In 1691, the Dutch and Spanish governments reached agreements with Meknes for the liberation of a number of captives. The sultan drove a hard bargain, particularly with Spain, negotiating a captive exchange rate of 1:10—one hundred Spanish officers of the Larache garrison for a thousand Moroccans, probably men being held as laborers at Ceuta—and he squeezed Madrid for 200,000 écus in ransom.²⁰

Perhaps spurred on by this example, the French tried again. In April 1693, Louis sent François Pidou de Saint-Olon, a seasoned statesman and soldier, as his emissary to Morocco. As will be examined later in these pages, although he made a much better impression than his predecessor, Saint-Olon ultimately failed as well, because in the end, the two sides had very different expectations. Louis had no interest in an alliance with Morocco, a kingdom that could offer no tangible support to French ambitions. Paris

merely wanted the Moroccan government to abandon its support for the corsairs, and if they opened their land to trade, so much the better. The French did not want to follow Ismail's plan for repatriation, which would have emptied the galleys at Toulon of many of their best rowers.²¹ For his part, the Moroccan ruler made quite clear to Saint-Olon that he wanted a lot more from the Great Frank than a mere agreement over captives. Certainly he was eager to keep as many of his foreign workmen as possible, but he was prepared to lose some here and there, and to rein in the corsairs, in exchange for military assistance from France. The sultan wanted French military stores and gunpowder weapons, and potentially that kingdom's assistance against his traditional enemy, Spain. Only after Saint-Olon's visit did it become apparent to Moulay Ismail that the French had no interest in exploring such a relationship. Captives! All these Franks cared about was captives.

The period after Saint-Olon's mission saw another lull in Franco-Moroccan relations, perhaps in part because of the Nine Years' War. For Louis, the war's ebbs and flows were maddening and all consuming. Additionally, more of the load of government was resting upon his shoulders than ever before, and as much as Louis immersed himself in the affairs of state, he was not a micromanager. The king had always counted on the talents of important ministers and generals, but the great men—Vauban, Turenne, Louvois, and Colbert—were now gone, and the latest generation was not equal to the task. A pity it was, for Louis had Europe's largest field army, some 300,000 men, but absent a great captain, the French muddled along from one inconclusive victory to another with the enemy refusing to concede.

French atrocities in the Palatinate inflamed Europe. Louis's forces devastated cities along the Rhine and the Moselle—picturesque places such as Mannheim, Heidelberg, Heilborn, Worms, and Bingen—so that they might not be used as bases of support for attacks against the French. Louis's treasury soon ran dry, and without Colbert's magic, he had to resort to extremes. He sent his household silver to the mint to help pay his troops, but eventually he had to resort to a first-ever capitation, a head tax, remarkable in that it fell on noble and commoner alike. Hunger stalked the countryside, and still the grand balls and parties continued as gaily as ever.

For the first time since the Fronde of the Princes, criticism began to close in on the old king, isolated and—as rumor had it—oblivious to the sufferings of his people.

Finally, in 1697, the Treaty of Ryswick put an end to the madness. All parties were exhausted, physically and financially. France had averted defeat, but the terms were harsh for her. She had been forced to give up all her gains since the Peace of Nijmegen, with the exception of Strasbourg. Catalonia and Luxembourg were evacuated, as were the cities of Mons and Kortrijk in the Spanish Netherlands. France returned Kehl, Freiburg, Brisach, Philippsburg, and the Duchy of Lorraine to the Emperor, and William III recovered his principality in southern France. Louis also had to promise to cease his activities for the Stuart restoration in England. Still, Louis portrayed this as a victory. After all, had he not fended off the grand coalition? Of course, the nobles humored their king, but they knew that one more of these so-called victories would ruin the country.

By 1698, Europe appeared to be entering a period of stability. At Ryswick, the European powers appeared to have settled the unresolved issues from the Peace of Nijmegen. The only cloud on the horizon was the matter of Spanish succession, but all wanted to resolve it peacefully. No one wanted another war.²²

With the Christian powers finally at peace, Moulay Ismail judged it time to pick up the thread with the French, so in 1699 he sent Louis another emissary, a close confidant named Abdallah Ben Aïsha. Ben Aïsha, admiral of the “fleet” of corsairs, was experienced in European affairs, a skill he had gained as an English captive. The details are unclear, but it appears that Ben Aïsha had been captured by the English, likely at sea, and carried to England, where he was purchased by the Duke of York, the future James II. In 1671, he had been taken to the continent, where he met several notables, among them the Duke of Florence, and witnessed several sieges and other military operations in Holland and Germany. Ben Aïsha and the duke developed a friendship, and the latter interceded with his brother, Charles II, for the captive’s release. Freed without ransom, Ben Aïsha returned to Morocco where he found service in the sultan’s army. His military campaigns included, ironically, the siege of Tangiers. In addition to his

experience in modern methods of war, Ben Aïsha's utility to the sultan was enhanced by his mastery of English and Spanish. The admiral did not speak French, but neither had Mohammad Temim; the Great Frank had interpreters of many tongues, Arabic included.

Ben Aïsha arrived in Brest in November and, like Mohammad Temim, had to endure a long wait there before receiving the royal go-ahead to proceed to Paris. On January 12, Ben Aïsha and his entourage of sixteen at last set off on the well-traveled path to Paris via Rennes, Nantes, and Angers. On a bleak winter day at the end of January, the party paused at Tours, the site of Charles Martel's victory over an invading Umayyad army in 732 CE, the high-water mark of Islam in Western Europe. Here Ben Aïsha offered prayers for the martyrs and pocketed a few stones as souvenirs.

The party arrived in Paris on February 9, and a week later Ben Aïsha had his introductory audience with Louis. After preliminary flourishes and the presentation of the ambassador's credentials, gifts were exchanged. Perhaps recalling the earlier debacle of live animals, on this occasion the Moroccans had opted gifts of the inert kind—a richly embroidered saddle, a tiger skin, and five lion skins, among other things. No doubt amused by this African parsimony, the French king waved a bejeweled finger and out came the sultan's gifts—two crystal candelabra, several watches, twelve richly brocaded coats, two bowls of embossed silver, a number of ornate pistols, a carpet, and four floor clocks. Lastly, servants carried in a sofa and chairs of the finest Savonnerie, which must have caused Ben Aïsha to suppress a laugh in turn. Muslims did not sit on such things!²³

As he awaited a response to Moulay Ismail's proposals, Ben Aïsha took in the sights, visiting the Cathedral of Notre Dame and other churches, the Royal Mint, the Royal Library, the observatory, and a glass factory. He became something of a celebrity in Paris. Conspicuous in his Moroccan garb, Ben Aïsha attracted attention everywhere he went, to the point that police had to be detailed for his benefit. The French were impressed by the old admiral's simplicity and piety. It was duly noted that Ben Aïsha passed Ramadan in the French capital, and despite the many temptations he encountered during his busy social calendar, he abstained from eating or drinking between sunrise and sunset.

In the salons, Ben Aïsha was quite the charmer. At a ball given in his honor by Madame Saint-Olon, someone complained of the number of guests trying to shoehorn into the ballroom, to which the admiral rejoined, “In paradise, nothing can annoy the angels.” At another soiree, a guest asked him why Muslim men took more than one wife. Ben Aïsha, no doubt having anticipated this question, replied neatly, “In order to find combined in several women the qualities that are united in every French woman.”²⁴ Mais, il est adorable! The French lapped it up like cream.

The emotional highlight of the trip was Ben Aïsha’s visit to the exiled James II at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, outside Paris. The two men had not seen each other in two decades, and their encounter—marked by “tears in abundance” according to a French onlooker—was a reminder of how much had transpired since.²⁵ They had a second encounter just before Ben Aïsha’s return home.

During his stay in Paris, Ben Aïsha lodged at the house of Jean Jourdan, a French diplomat and merchant. Although seemingly an unimportant detail, this relationship served to document the last Moroccan diplomatic effort with the court of Louis XIV, since the surviving letters Ben Aïsha wrote to the Jourdans upon his return to Morocco provide details about what transpired in France and Moulay Ismail’s subsequent efforts to advance a Franco-Moroccan alliance.

Just how these two men came to know each other is not known. Jourdan was a member of the Société de Salé, so perhaps he had encountered Ben Aïsha while conducting business in that city. At any event, during his stay in Paris, Ben Aïsha formed a close relationship with Jourdan, his wife, and his children. The depth of that intimacy is recorded in the aforementioned letters. Of his regard for the Jourdan family, Ben Aïsha wrote, “I assure you, only God knows how I miss you in my heart.” Still more remarkable for a Muslim man of that time was the fact that Ben Aïsha felt comfortable enough to write to Madame Jourdan directly and with the same intimacy. In his letter to her of July 2, 1700, Ben Aïsha penned, “There is no happier day than one in which I receive your letter. May God show me your face.”²⁶

The Moroccan was fascinated with the novelties he encountered in Paris. There was a copper box, named for a man called Pascal, with gears and wheels that calculated numerical solutions. Another device, the Roberval balance, was a scale of two plates linked by the vertical beam; one placed the object to be weighed on one plate and then added or subtracted calibrated masses from the other plate until level is reached. Ingenious! Some conveniences were so simple they were inspired, like horse-drawn carriages for hire. Others bordered on frivolous, such as the windup timepieces small enough for the pocket and a pressure pot that cooked meat in minutes instead of hours. Then there were the oddities from abroad, from India and the Far East! Before departing, Ben Aïsha made numerous demands of his friend, including a carpet, the finest porcelain, and articles from Jourdan's trade in India—requests he would repeat in his letters from Morocco.

Unfortunately, Ben Aïsha failed at his primary business, for Moulay Ismail's terms were nothing that Louis had not already rejected on several occasions. After a final audience on April 26, Abdallah Ben Aïsha and his delegation departed for the long voyage home. Arriving in Salé on June 10, the admiral repaired to Meknes for the dreaded meeting with his master.

Abdallah Ben Aïsha's letter to Jourdan of September 1699 provided details of this encounter. The admiral described how his master responded to the note that he had brought from Louis, in which the French king boasted of his military might and threatened war if his demands were not met. Unimpressed, Moulay Ismail observed that although the seas may belong to the Christians, on terra firma the Muslims could give a good enough account of themselves. "If he wishes to make war on land," Ismail huffed, "then he should merely inform us of the location, and we will give him ample time to assemble his armies and organize his forces the way he wants. And then he will see what the soldiers of Islam are capable of doing —what his eyes have never seen before, Allah willing."²⁷

Moulay Ismail was in a foul mood by this point, and he proceeded to upbraid his admiral for staying so long in France. "As soon as you saw the people there change their attitude to you and no longer exhibit the former emotions," he glowered, "you should not have stayed there so long and

returned to us sooner.” Ben Aïsha tried to soothe his master’s feelings with descriptions of the courtesies that he had been shown and the wonderful disposition of the French toward Morocco. He described the delightful gifts that he had brought, a subject that never failed to soften the old skinflint. Moulay Ismail, now somewhat mollified, wanted to hear every detail of those weeks in France. He listened with rapt attention to the description of Versailles, the Louvre, the immense bells of Notre Dame, the incredible court ceremony, the bizarre dress, and the lascivious customs of drink and flirtation.

One of Ben Aïsha’s more absorbing stories concerned the English king in exile, James II. Moulay Ismail appeared to empathize with the man, and he would write him a remarkable letter, which is contained in the appendix. Rambling, often condescending, this missive is also replete with intellectual liberties large and small. The document reveals much about Moulay Ismail’s arrogance, but it also exposes his naiveté about European affairs. The letter was primarily an argument for James to convert to Islam, or at the very least to Protestantism, but it also contained a bit of political advice for bringing about James’s reconciliation with his people. Ah, if the sultan could only provide material support! Ismail wrote, “By Allah, I swear, if we were not Arab peoples, and a people unskilled in the maritime arts, or if we had someone here who was adept at this art to whom we could confer the command of troops, I would write to the English and send you troops with which you could descend upon England, return to your estates, and remount your throne.”²⁸

One can only imagine James’s reaction to this stupefying document. By the time he received it, the former king of England was sixty-five years old and in declining health; he would live only another two years. Moreover, for some time he had been quite resigned to his situation. A decade earlier, with French military assistance, James had invaded Ireland in hope of regaining his throne, but he had been defeated by William of Orange at the Battle of Boyne and forced to return to France. Since then, James had settled into the life of a pensioner, albeit a comfortable one. Louis had established James and Mary at his chateau at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where they aged in obscurity, though on occasion they were trundled back into the light at

Versailles. In this context, Moulay Ismail's note must have taken on a mocking nature.

Moulay Ismail was so fascinated with Ben Aïsha's stories that he held the admiral at Meknes for several weeks. The French could have had no greater advocate in Morocco, and as the days went by, the sultan forgot his anger and once more warmed to an alliance with the Franks. In a second letter to Jourdan, dated November 15, 1699, Ben Aïsha related, "I did not stop telling him about Sultan Louis, his court, his reign, his fame, his gracious manners and his honor, his kindness to all people, and his power over all kings of the Christian, until he absorbed all the information. To which Ismail replied, 'Such a man deserves to be known and befriended.'"²⁹

But Ben Aïsha knew that stories could placate the sultan for only so long. He needed the promised gifts, and not just because the sultan liked exotic things—the presents would be a sign of good faith. So in his letters to Jourdan, Ben Aïsha implored his friend to send the articles from India that they had discussed, including porcelain and "twelve large eating pots" for couscous. Cost, he insisted, was no consideration. He also requested twelve pairs of pheasants, male and female, that he had seen in the French countryside, and in a subsequent letter, he placed an order for three diamonds and a kilo of pearls.³⁰

There were days when Ben Aïsha wished the sultan would tire of his anecdotes so that he might return to Salé. Sometimes their sessions left him with a list of tasks, such as letters to write, questions to answer, and topics to research, and one day's session even yielded a marriage proposal. On that morning, Ben Aïsha had been chatting with the sultan rather harmlessly about an evening in Paris when he had mingled with the Dauphin, their heir, and other blue bloods. He digressed to describe a woman who had obviously captured his fancy—the Princess of Conti, Marie-Anne de Bourdon, the daughter of Louis and La Vallière. Marie-Anne had been married at the age of fourteen to the Prince of Conti, who died five years later. Although the princess had received many offers of marriage thereafter, she was content to be a social butterfly in her beloved Paris. At thirty-three years of age, she had lost none of her beauty and vivacity.

Moulay Ismail was captivated by the charms of la grande princesse de Conti. He also was intrigued by her pluck—and the possibilities. After her wedding night, as the story went, the little tart had openly and scandalously impugned her husband's sexual competence. And there might be a political angle that he had not yet considered. Perhaps the best way to reach an alliance with France was through the time-honored strategy of royal family intermarriage. The Alaouites and the Bourbons. Yes, it might answer.

The sultan raised his hand and cut off his admiral. "Go, O Ben Aïsha, in this instant and hour," he commanded, "and journey to France for the purpose of asking for the hand of that girl whose qualities you have described to me. And do not return until you have a reply that satisfies me. If Allah wills, we will marry her in accordance with the law of our book and the law of our chosen Prophet, the peace of Allah be upon him. She will retain her religion and the customs of her predecessors, and she will not experience anything unsatisfactory in all her affairs." Ben Aïsha prevailed upon his master to instead allow him to send a letter to one of his new friends, Pontchartrain, the chancellor of France, via Jean Jourdan, since traveling at sea was difficult at that time of year.³¹

This latest bizarre missive from Meknes must have passed through the salons of Paris like wildfire. Why, it was inimaginable! The very idea, sending a princess of the blood (even an illegitimate one) into the harem of the Moor! By this time, Louis and his ministers certainly considered the Moroccan ruler to be a most eccentric figure, but now they must have begun to question his sanity. The refusal was a curt one, and both parties, in mutual discomfort, let the matter drop as if it had never risen. But poets and satirists found the topic irresistible, and through them history would remember. As Jean-Baptiste Rousseau penned,

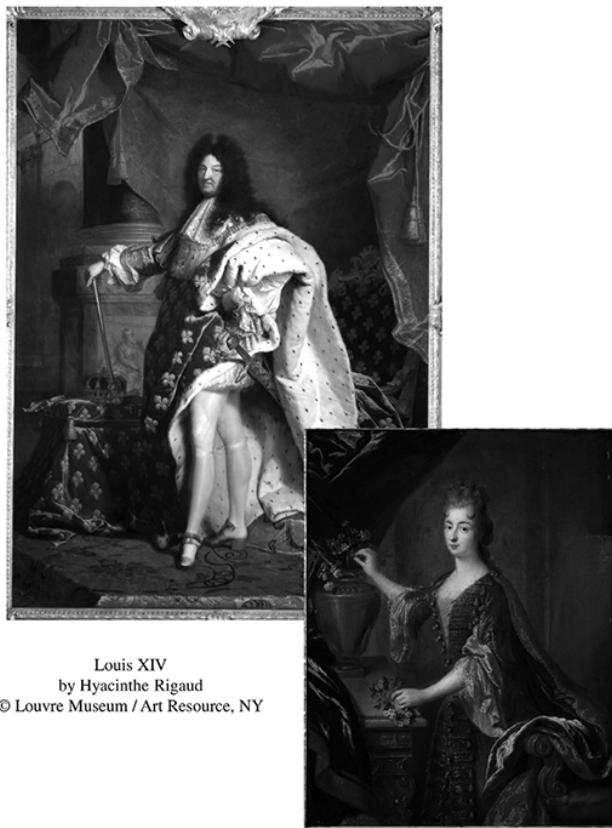
Votre beauté, grande princesse,
Porte les traits dont elle blesse
Jusqu'aux plus sauvages lieux.

L'Afrique avec vous capitule,
Et les conquêtes de vos yeux
Vont plus loin que celles d'Hercules.³²

PART 3

HOUSE OF THE TYRANT

Figure 15: Louis XIV and Marie-Anne de Bourbon



Louis XIV
by Hyacinthe Rigaud
© Louvre Museum / Art Resource, NY

Marie-Anne de Bourbon, Mademoiselle de Blois, princesse de Conti
by Troy de François
© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Figure 16: Versailles Palace



(author photo)

Figure 17: James II



by Sir Godfrey Kneller (1684)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Figure 18: Ambassadors



Mohammed Temin ambassador of the Sultan of Morocco and his entourage
at the Comédie Italienne, Paris, February 1682
by Antoine Coypel
© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY



Abdallah Ben Aisha
by anonymous artist (1699)
(Memorial du Maroc, V4: 47)



Mohammad Ben Haddou
by anonymous artist (1682)
(Matar, cover)

Figure 19: Audiences of Saint-Olon



Audience held at Meknes by the Sultan of Morocco Moulay Ismaïl in honor of François Pidou,
chevalier de Saint-Olon, special envoy of Louis XIV, on June 11, 1693
by Pierre-Denis Martin
© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Figure 20: Audiences of Saint-Olon



Reception of François Pidou de Saint Olon, Ambassador of Louis XIV of France by Ismail ibn Sharif, 1693
by Pierre-Denis Martin
© Alamy

Figure 21 Volubilis and Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail



Roman ruins of Volubilis
(author photo)



Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail
(author photo)

12

BLOOD AND VANITY

Thy ardor cannot check the rapid power
Of Mahomet, and but provokes his vengeance:
There was a time when you might safely draw
The sword of justice, to defend the rights
Of Mecca, and prevent the flames of war
From spreading o'er the land; then Mahomet
Was but a bold and factious citizen,
But now he is a conqueror, and a king;
Mecca's impostor at Medina shines
A holy prophet; nations bend before him,
And learn to worship crimes which we abhor.
Even here, a band of wild enthusiasts, drunk
With furious zeal, support his fond delusions,
His idle tales, and fancied miracles:
These spread sedition through the gaping throng,
Invite his forces, and believe a God

Inspires and renders him invincible.

—Voltaire's *Mahomet*, Act I, Scene I¹

Morocco, 1693–1694

François Pidou de Saint-Olon was into his cups again.² It was sunset on the fourth day at sea, and—Grâce à Dieu—they were still underway. He could breathe again, if only for a few hours.

Pirates and corsairs had been on Saint-Olon's mind nearly every waking hour since they lost sight of the coast of France. Although the Moors, the corsairs of Salé and Tétouan, might be expected to honor his diplomatic credentials, the notorious cutthroat Turks of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli certainly would not. All sorts of unfortunate outcomes flashed before his eyes.

Thus far, things had gone well enough. The weather was cooperating, and the ship had made good time as it cut south-southwest along the Spanish coast. The captain had charted a course close enough to make a dash for shelter if needed. Spain was no friend to France, but the Spanish loathed the Muslim bandits more than anyone, so they could be expected to offer shelter if the ship came under attack. Providence had been with them to this point, but tomorrow would begin the real test, the critical run across the Strait of Gibraltar and a primary hunting ground of the Barbary corsairs.

The Arc-En-Ciel, an old tub, continued to creak despite the fair weather. In his cramped cabin—one of the ship's better ones—the Frenchman maneuvered to the wooden bunk, sitting down heavily as the floor stirred beneath him. He shifted his buttocks upon the paltry straw mattress, banging his head on a beam in the process. Saint-Olon cursed, marveling that anyone could tolerate such a lifestyle. Uncorking a flask of perfume, he

dashed a bit around the spot where he would shortly lay his head. Imagine the smell of this ship in the summertime! He knocked back the last of the bottle. The ship heaved more perceptibly, jostling the latrine bucket out of the corner, and he eyed it warily before lying back in his bunk.

Saint-Olon was roused by the sound of boots and voices above. Shafts of light told him it was well past daybreak. Slipping into his boots, long coat, and tricorn hat, he climbed the stairway to the quarterdeck, pausing while his eyes adjusted to the light. His old body ached, and he was thirsty and a bit foul in the stomach. A gust almost carried off his hat. He moved back to the break of the poop deck, where he was shielded from the wind. Though land was visible on both left and right, it was too distant to discern anything other than a rugged outline. Holding his tricorn in place, Saint-Olon shuffled around the corner of the poop deck for a quick look astern. Squinting into the breeze, he spied the Pillars of Hercules, the fabled entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar, far in their wake and partially obscured by the morning glare. On the right was the great Rock of Gibraltar; on the opposite shore, the Africa side, was the finger of land that marked the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.

Returning to his sheltered position, Saint-Olon's attention shifted south to the Barbary Coast. He was shortly joined by Guillaume, one of the gentlemen in his retinue, who brought him a cup of hot tea. Together they sipped in silence, but each knew what the other was thinking—the safety of the coast was still hours away. A call rang out, the tackle groaned, and the two men looked skyward as the mizzen mast was hauled to starboard. It was sail, not the twenty-eight brass cannon, that was their best protection. Fortunately, this triple-masted barque had enough canvas to outrun most corsair vessels.

François Pidou de Saint-Olon was no mariner. He knew of the Barbary Coast mainly by reputation, but in that respect, he was well informed. His previous diplomatic assignments in Genoa and Madrid had more than acquainted him with the usual horror stories associated with Muslims—their rapaciousness, cruelty and bizarre customs. His brief trip to Salé three years earlier had confirmed these reports, and he had no particular desire to set foot in that land again. At fifty-three, he considered himself too old for

this business, but he could not refuse Colbert, the sage old secretary of state for foreign affairs.³ The marquis reasoned that if he, Saint-Olon, could deal with the steely-eyed Castilians and the mingy Genoese, he should be able to handle the Moors. Saint-Olon was less sure. He already knew plenty about Muslim duplicity, and the Moors were reputed to be the gold standard of deceit.

It was a challenging assignment, trying to nail the Moorish sultan down to a peace treaty that included provisions for trade and terms for the repatriation of French captives. The latter was the priority objective. He had brought along a list of 233 French captives, at least twenty-three of whom were invalids, and his instructions were to establish a common and reasonable price for each of them.

The diplomatic initiative had begun a decade earlier when Mohammad Temim had visited the court of Louis XIV. Saint-Olon still smiled when he remembered the night Temim and his entourage attended the *Comédie italienne* at the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. Of course the Muslims understood nothing of this farcical romp in a strange language; few Frenchmen did, since it was in Italian. But the sight of the Moors, eyes wide and whispering to each like debutants attending their first ball, was delicious. Their reaction, he was certain, was less about the *mise en scène* and more about the bare female shoulders.

By late afternoon they were sailing parallel to the coast, close enough to appreciate the stunning details of heavily eroded slopes, hardy vegetation, and what seemed to be a complete absence of human habitation. The terrain rose quickly into broad ridgelines, sliced open here and there into deep draws that revealed distant peaks of lavender hue.

The ship's bow came about to the small harbor that served Tétouan. Had it not been for the cluster of vessels—about a dozen brigantines, sloops, and smaller coastal craft—they would not have marked it as a port. The city itself was a few kilometers inland, rows of whitewashed buildings terraced into a promontory that marked the northern side of the Riff Mountain Range. A few ramshackle piers and wooden shanties and two slipways were the extent of the harbor facilities. From one pier a group of men watched them, among them a European easily identifiable by his clothing.

The European, still boyish looking at thirty-one, was the French consul Jean-Baptiste Estelle.⁴ By French standards, Estelle was very experienced in the Maghreb, having spent three years in Algiers when his father was consul there. For the past four years, he had been French consul at Salé, where he and Saint-Olon had first met in 1690. When Saint-Olon received his assignment to proceed to Meknes in the spring of 1693, he requested Estelle's support as part of his retinue. The fellow spoke passable Arabic and knew many of the ruler's ministers, but more importantly, he also knew how these shifty Mahometans operated.

After exchanging pleasantries with the local pasha's welcoming committee, Saint-Olon left his aides to see to the baggage, and he and Estelle mounted horses for the short ride to the city. There they would enjoy the hospitality of another fellow countryman, the consul of Tétouan, until their departure for the capital. Climbing to the terrace, the men enjoyed the freshness of the evening and the last rays of daylight twinkling on the sea. Their host produced two bottles of local eau de vie, explaining that many people drank here. Yes, wine had been produced in Morocco since Roman times. Of course, it was prohibited to the Muslims under their religion, but in this land virtue was for public consumption. Hypocrisy was in the blood.

As he awaited his summons to Meknes, Saint-Olon took stock of his surroundings and, with the consuls at his side, toured Tétouan. It was not a particularly large city, with a population of about twelve thousand, rather modest for the kingdom's major commercial center on the Mediterranean coast. However, the presence of the consuls as well as other foreign diplomats here and in Salé—spoke to the importance of these cities as conduits to the outside world, although, as the consuls' role indicated, with a distinctly Barbary twist.

In the broadest sense, the consul's task was to promote the interests of their government and their citizens in the host country, which primarily meant assisting their nation's merchants in making the right contacts and mediating disputes with the local government. In the Barbary, these duties included facilitating the repatriation of Christian captives, and consuls often acted as intermediaries between the families of captives and the Moroccan authorities. On behalf of the captives, they passed mail and facilitated

ransom negotiations, payments, and travel; they also assisted the work of religious and charitable organizations dedicated to this end. The Spanish consuls had the added responsibility to support the work of hospitals in Tétouan, Salé, and Meknes that were operated for the captives by Spanish monks of the Franciscan Order. The Christian prison houses provided these modest facilities with plenty of work. Having visited these overcrowded, miserable pens, it was abundantly clear to Saint-Olon—despite the fishing, basket weaving, pottery making, woodworking, and a hundred other trades—that in Tétouan, as in Salé, economic life revolved around privateering.

Otherwise, Saint-Olon found Tétouan quite different from Salé. Whereas the latter was gray, glowering, and malarial, Tétouan was a Mediterranean city—built of the usual dried mud, but dressed up in a coat of whitewash—where elevation purified the air. This was no garrison city. The rugged Riffan landscape, combined with the absence of the threat of naval bombardment, obviated the need for the kind of massive fortifications found at Salé. Tétouan was enclosed by a single wall of mud brick about three meters high that coursed along the hills and was penetrated at several points by horseshoe gates. Inside were tiers of streets that snaked up the mountainside, a rather well-ordered contrast to the confused labyrinth of adobe dwellings and crooked alleyways that was the medina of Salé. As elsewhere in this kingdom, every dwelling was masked by high walls, for it was the way of the Moor to hide his sanctuary from covetous eyes. Within the outer door was a world of airy courtyards, fountains, birds, and elaborate tile and plaster work that evoked the Saracens of old Cordoba. The inside world was clean, well ordered, quiet, and comfortable—in short, everything the public areas were not.

There were other surprises. At the central market, the souk, Spanish was commonly overheard, a reminder that most people who inhabited this place were Moriscos, former Andalusian Muslims driven from Spain in decades past. Even though most had been in Morocco for generations, they retained their cultural and linguistic affinity for Al Andalus. Here in Tétouan, as in Salé, these exiles turned their ire on Christendom in taking to jihad on the high seas. They had flourished during the decadence of the Saadian dynasty and before the rise of the Alaouites, when they became autonomous regions. Moulay Ismail had recently restored both cities to the crown's

control, but he wisely left them to manage their own business. In return for his protection, the sultan demanded his “royal fifth” of the booty the corsairs took; he also claimed all the slaves, for which he paid fifty pieces each. Despite their bitter history, Saint-Olon observed, the people appeared to be well disposed toward foreigners.

The consuls pointed out corsairs on the streets of Tétouan. They were not hard to spot with their penchant for sleeveless tunics and baggy breeches, in contrast to the djellabas favored by other men. They seemed to be on every street corner, knots of men drinking sweet mint tea and puffing on hookah pipes. Perhaps Estelle had been right. During Saint-Olon’s visit to Salé, the consul had told him that the vessels there were in poor condition due to shortages of munitions, rope, sail, and other supplies. For what was ostensibly the royal fleet, the consul added, the sultan provided nothing for maintenance. Each captain was expected to fend for himself, and repair materials usually came from a captured prize.⁵ Poor maintenance might explain the many idle corsairs, as well as the Arc-En-Ciel’s uneventful crossing.

At some point, perhaps during the first days in Tétouan, Saint-Olon began to document his voyage with an eye to publishing an account of his mission and the general state of Morocco. Over the next two months, he took copious notes about the land—the geography, major cities, government, military arts, food, clothing, and customs. Much of it obviously was not firsthand information, but gleaned instead from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian sources. As such, it was a mixed bag, more or less equal parts of firsthand observations, biases, and gossip. Some of it was intended to shock, such as Saint-Olon’s report that the sexual preference of Muslim women was Christian men because they were not circumcised.⁶

He certainly got an earful about the tyrant Moulay Ismail. Stories about the sultan were legion—his overflowing harem, battalions of children, vast energy, avarice, stinginess, and above all, his cruelty. On his orders, the despot’s notorious black guard had murdered untold numbers, and Ismail himself had murdered thousands, so it was said. According to one account, Moulay Ismail had personally killed fifty adherents of a new religious sect. The naive enthusiasts had gone to Meknes to convert the Commander of the

Faithful to their line of thinking, resolving to die by the ruler's hand if they failed. The sultan obliged them, having his soldiers line them up in two ranks, whereupon he passed before them and gave each of the zealots a thrust of his lance.⁷ At first, Saint-Olon did not accept all this at face value, because he knew such stories were generally exaggerated.

Toward the end of May, the pasha of the city arrived with the news that the sultan was prepared to see the emissary of Louis XIV in Meknes. Shortly thereafter, Saint Olon, his retinue, his Moorish interpreter Estelle, and an Arab escort, along with a train of mules carrying their baggage and a considerable number of gifts for the sultan, set out for the 190-kilometer trek south to Meknes.

Traveling in early summer was pleasant, and the terrain was spectacular. The initial stage of two days took them through the heart of the Riffan chain along trails that followed the natural drift of the narrow passes. One did not need a military eye to see this was ambush country, with hills and mountains staring down in all directions. Oak and cedar trees luxuriated on the peaks, and goat paths crisscrossed impossible slopes. Evidence of rock slides was everywhere. Other than the hooves grinding, the creaking of leather against their backsides, and the sneezing of man and beast, there was scarcely a sound to be heard. They camped on the outskirts of Chefchaouene, a city closely resembling Tétouan, where their backsides froze in the high altitude weather, and the men woke grumpy and clammy with dew.

The second day was even tougher—an arduous meandering along dry riverbeds, stumbling over omnipresent mountain debris, until they finally reached the hamlet of Ouazzane late in the evening. Once again, the damp mountain air made for an uncomfortable night on the ground, and few slept much. Late the next morning, the group finally emerged from the last of the ridgelines and descended to an arid terrain of rolling hills. Then they picked up a trail along the banks of the Rdat, a small river, and followed it south.

By the end of the third day, the terrain had noticeably improved. The land was still undulating, but the low hills were bounded by patches of green that indicated shallow riverbeds. Here and there, bushy wild olive trees and lentisk shrubs dotted the landscape. Invariably, not far away were douars,

with their tasseled tents and flocks of livestock, which began to appear in greater abundance. These communities were clusters of tribal family units that moved with the pasturage.

On the fourth day, after the little group forded the Rahmoune River, the terrain became noticeably more verdant and the air less choked with dust. They were entering the heart of the Saïs Valley, and as they neared the capital, they encountered increasing numbers of traveling Moors. A few were on horseback and some were riding mules, but most were on foot, poorly shod if at all, with their traveling kits in bundles on their backs. Most of these people, Saint-Olon was told, were headed in one of three directions: to Meknes, to Fez, or to worship at Moulay Idriss, the shrine of Morocco's first Islamic ruler.

The Frenchman was impressed with the region, as his notes would later show, and it is not hard to see why. In a country with generally poor soil quality, this area of north-central Morocco, irrigated by the mountain ranges of the Riff and the Middle Atlas, is prime agricultural acreage. Today the region is still a breadbasket and the heart of the country's ever-expanding wine industry.

After a journey of four days, they arrived at Meknes on the afternoon of June 2. In all likelihood, Saint-Olon was greeted by a delegation headed by Mohammad Ben Haddou Atar, one of the sultan's chief ministers. Saint-Olon would later learn that this official had been sent abroad as Ismail's ambassador to London twelve years earlier.

Saint-Olon hit it off with Atar. The two men had a couple of things in common: a French mother and a dislike for the English. The Moroccan's mother was from Marseilles, and he spoke none too highly of his experiences in England—the filth, the vile climate, and the slop that answered for food. Furthermore, Atar had been humiliated at Whitehall by being obliged to remove his turban and slippers before being admitted before the king. Although Atar had many memorable moments during his sojourn, including visiting Oxford and Cambridge, and being made a Fellow of the Royal Society, that initial audience cast a pall over the entire six months he spent in London.

The Frenchman described the Moor as being in his midfifties, a good listener with a sharp mind. The minister was apparently not too well liked among his peers, perhaps because Atar was the least ostentatious of them. He also was close to Moulay Zaydan, the presumptive heir, with whom he shared mutual “pleasures.”⁸ Genoa, Madrid, Versailles, and Meknes—court jealousies and intrigues were the same everywhere.

The French emissary and his entourage were sequestered in a small palace, one of many on the imperial complex, and warned to be ready at a moment’s notice to appear before the sultan. For nine days Saint-Olon waited, until the summons finally came early on the morning of June 11. The group scurried into their regalia and hastily applied a bit of powder and makeup. As previously arranged, twelve French captives were summoned to carry the many gifts—including luxurious cloth, carpets, and arms—that he had brought for Ismail.⁹

Saint Olon and his entourage were escorted through the massive Bab Mansour to the Ksar el-Mhanncha, where the sultan conducted most of his diplomatic business, and deposited in an open-air pavilion to wait. Two paces in front of his attendants, the emissary stood facing an alley that passed between two buildings; on each side stood probably a hundred black soldiers, long and lean fellows in sleeveless robes, red bonnets, and all cradling muskets. Behind them stood a gaggle of ragged men and boys, slaves evidently. Minutes passed, and the heat began to tell. The courtier’s European attire, he quickly deduced, with its layers, high collars, and cascading wool periwig, was absurd in such a climate. The umbrella held over Saint-Olon’s head by a black youth helped stave off perspiration, but after a quarter of an hour, beads of sweat began to burn his eyes and flies alighted on his nose and lips.

Finally, Moulay Ismail appeared advancing down the alleyway, mounted on a white horse and accompanied by a small retinue. Before him a slave led a riderless horse, richly bridled, and as they approached, the figure of a man—probably a Christian captive, judging by the fellow’s complexion—could be seen behind the beast’s haunches. In one hand he held the horse’s tail, and in the other a pot and rag. Saint-Olon would later learn that this was a prized mount, one of the few that had returned from the hajj; as such, it was

now an object of veneration and living out its years in ease. Such would explain the presence of the Christian, whose task was to catch the beast's excrement and wipe its derriere.¹⁰

Saint-Olon quickly turned his attention back to the approaching sultan, who drew up several paces away. Ismail's face was partially obscured by a brown kerchief that covered his mouth and nose. Saint-Olon found it to be an unsettling effect. The sultan dismounted and seated himself on a great wooden post while his attendants positioned themselves on the ground to his left. They were a bleak, emotionless lot—brown faces and almond eyes, all dressed in the same drab djellabas and barefoot. A black slave began swishing a large fan up and down, as much to chase away the flies as to cool the sovereign.

One can only wonder what Ismail thought of the frilly Frenchman standing before him—his almost feminine allure with its curls and lace, face paint and powder, and high-heeled shoes bearing large bows. The Frenchmen must have had the opposite view of these bedraggled Moors. The artist Pierre-Denis Martin would later capture the scene in a painting (Figure 19), emphatically situating the French ambassador and his resplendent retinue in the sunlight of a great arch, while Ismail appears to be off tableau.

Saint-Olon uncovered his head and bowed solemnly. Ismail, speaking no foreign tongue, managed “tay buon,” which Saint-Olon took to mean a greeting of welcome. Through an interpreter, the two observed the diplomatic niceties. Saint-Olon passed along his king's desire for a pact with such a great Islamic ruler, and Ismail, affirming the same desire, recognized the great power of the greatest king of the Franks. Their conversation went something like this:

Ismail: “It is my earnest desire that we may see a profitable peace. To that end, I have charged my minister, Mohammad Ben Haddou Atar, to see to the details.”

Saint-Olon: “Your majesty is most kind in placing me in the hands of so fine a minister. With his good offices, I am confident that we shall soon find the fruits of our wishes.”

Ismail: "Our hope is to achieve a swift and reciprocal alliance with the armies of the emperor of France against the Spanish and our common enemies. We particularly desire the aid of France in driving these Spaniards from our realm."

Saint-Olon: "Majesty, once the treaty is signed and ratified by both countries, we should be pleased to discuss all options of military assistance and cooperation. Be assured that the emperor, my master, is equally strong on land and water, with formidable fleets in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean ready to respond to any contingency."

Ismail eyed him, and an uncomfortable silence followed. Saint-Olon wondered again if he has been translated accurately, for one could never be certain. He ended the awkward moment by presenting his letter from Louis XIV, which Atar stepped forward to receive with due solemnity. Saint-Olon then presented the gentlemen of his retinue, each of whom advanced a few steps, removed his cap and bowed with the customary flourishes. Then, it was time for presents. The emissary announced that he had with him "several curiosities," gifts from his master. The sultan brightened, particularly at the carpet, which he assumed to be from India. Mais non, Majesté! This carpet was made in Paris.

After a careful examination of the gifts, Ismail orders his black guards to collect them. The sultan offered his thanks and told Saint-Olon that he hesitated to accept such a kindness, but the laws of Islam did not permit him to refuse that which is offered in respect and friendship. Smiling broadly, he continued: "I hold you in the greatest esteem, and because of this, I pray to Almighty Allah that you convert to His faith."

Saint-Olon, laughing good naturedly, replied, "Majesty, you are too kind."

With that, Ismail beckoned the slaves forward. They were evidently from among the French contingent of captives, and no effort had been made to spruce them up for the occasion. Filthy things they were, with spindly arms hanging from threadbare cassocks. They shuffled forth several paces and then fell to the earth to grovel. The sultan selected four of the youngest and gave them to Saint-Olon as a gift. He then remounted his horse and returned from whence he had come. In fifteen minutes, the audience was over.

Later that afternoon, Saint-Olon had a short meeting with the sultan's son and presumed heir, Moulay Zaydan, who expressed satisfaction with the events of the day and thanked Saint-Olon for his generosity. As a sign of his appreciation, Zaydan presented the emissary with another French captive, one of his closest personal attendants. It was a promising start.

The next few days were employed in discussions with Atar about the terms of the treaty. Presumably this included conditions for the liberation of roughly two hundred French captives being held at Meknes, but Saint-Olon did not include such details in his account of these events.

When he was not meeting with the sultan and his ministers, Saint-Olon was learning about his surroundings, touring construction sites, and walking through the old medina. Upon entering the Jewish quarter, the mellah, he noted how Jews were obliged to wear black caps, in contrast to the red bonnets of the Muslims. He was told of Muslim discrimination against the Jews, who were given only the “most vile” jobs, onerously taxed, and lived in a perpetual state of insecurity. Because Muslim children would stone the Jews, the sultan’s guard had to be posted at the entry to the mellah, and the government was obliged to provide a security escort when Jews made forays into the countryside for fear that the Berbers and Arabs would massacre them. On the positive side, Saint-Olon observed that Jewish women were more fashionably dressed and better made up than their Muslim counterparts.¹¹ (We may wonder how he made this comparison, since any Muslim woman that he might have encountered would have been veiled.) Certainly, Jews faced discrimination and occasional violence, but, on the whole, much of Saint-Olon’s education of Jewish life in Morocco was patently false, including the notion that Jews held the lowest jobs in society. In fact, Jews—thanks to their talent for foreign languages, contacts in Europe, and skill in financial matters, to name but a few attributes—dominated many of the key economic sectors in the land. Some leading Jewish figures were close to the makhzen and could wield enormous influence in government.

Saint-Olon did experience a few authentic moments. In addition to observing rural life in the douars, he witnessed Muslim prayer rituals and tried his first Friday couscous. But, as with the Jews, much of what he

would later record from his mission came less from firsthand observation than from conversations, presumably with Estelle, the priests of the Habs Qara prison, the five liberated captives, and others less fortunate. One favorite topic of gossip was the harem, which was practically an obsession among the chaste monks and the randy captives. The notion that only a short distance away, their jailor kept some four hundred women “for his personal use” kept them awake at night. They also spoke of the Black Tigress, the so-called Sultana Zaydana. Saint-Olon found it hard to fathom why such a tyrant could be “entirely governed” by her, when she had “not a single feature of beauty.”¹² Apparently, her main attribute was simply being the mother of the presumed heir, one of 118 male children of Ismail then at Meknes.

The prevalent topic of conversation, however, was the tyrant’s demonic side, mercurial temper, and bloodlust, and Saint-Olon certainly got an earful of this. He would later claim that in the three weeks he spent in Meknes, Moulay Ismail murdered forty-seven people with his own hands. According to Saint-Olon, “public opinion” had it that the tyrant had similarly dispatched some twenty thousand over the preceding twenty years.¹³ The Frenchman, no stranger to royal absolutism, was fascinated by how this despot had terrorized his people into abject capitulation. In a passage notable in equal parts for the force of its prose and its cultural illiteracy, he wrote,

All nations are surprised by the submission and patience of these people in suffering such excessive cruelty, but one must understand that aside from their general powerlessness and inability to oppose him, they are heavily influenced by the notion that death at the hands of a Sharif King and descendant of the Prophet, leads them directly to Paradise; which pleases the majority, but is held in contempt by the more sensible minority, they [the minority] abstain from approaching the king as much as they are able; they are as pleased to avoid him, as the others feel in being killed by him.¹⁴

Saint-Olon's second audience was held on June 19 outside the royal stables. On this occasion Moulay Ismail's face was not obscured by a kerchief, and Saint-Olon got a good look at him. He described his host as follows: "I would say that he is 49 or 50 years of age, bronze in complexion, thin, with black hair that is starting to gray; his size is average, his Face oval, his Cheeks sunken, though his eyes are black and full of fire, his Nose is small and aquiline, the Chin pointed, the Lips thick, and the Mouth rather well proportioned."¹⁵

Once more, French artist Pierre-Denis Martin would take up his brush to capture the scene on canvas. In this work (Figure 20), Saint-Olon is seen at the head of a small French delegation, dressed in typical court finery, a knee-length red overcoat with enormous cuffs braided in gold, lace frill, dark tricorn hat, and molded leather boots with impossible heels. In this rendering, Moulay Ismail is center stage and cuts a dashing figure, seated atop a black horse, wearing rich robes and a plumed turban, and lance in hand. The sultan approaches the French delegation, followed by three retainers, probably renegades from the appearance of their complexions and attire. Around this scene is much activity, with various figures porting bales of hay and attending to the horses and the facilities. It was not a typical court scene, which the painter certainly intended to convey.

Even so, the artist could not fully capture the moment. To begin with, there was enormous tension in the air. As Saint-Olon made his way to the stables, someone, presumably a court official, warned him that Ismail was in a foul mood, for he had just killed with a knife two of his black guards. The Frenchman's stomach sank, and later, standing in the sultan's presence, his guts were in knots. Saint-Olon wrote of the moment: "He [Ismail] carried a long Lance, of the form and length of our Pikes, upon which he supported himself from time to time. While I spoke his Face was uncovered; he was very well dressed, but for the yellow Vest (the color of which his courtiers said was often fatal to those among them) and right Arm and Clothes covered with the blood of those miserable souls he had just killed; one had to see his Face, the distracted and furious countenance, which fit perfectly with the character of this act."¹⁶ Martin somehow failed to note the yellow vest and the blood, since they do not appear in his tableau.

There would be no third interview, and the treaty was never concluded. In the days that followed Saint-Olon's second audience, it had become obvious the various drafts did not meet with the sultan's approval. Eventually, Atar had stopped coming by Saint-Olon's quarters. When Saint-Olon learned that the sultan had quit the capital for the interior, the message was clear, and he soon departed for France. He left behind a letter for the sultan in which he politely explained his disappointment and departure. He would let Estelle pick up the thread.

Moulay Ismail was unaccustomed to such behavior. His pride was wounded and, more significantly, he risked losing face with the greatest king of the Franks. He could not, would not, let the frilly man have the last word.

Within weeks of Saint-Olon's return to Paris, Ismail's ambassador to the court of Louis XIV, Ali Hamamo, received a letter from his master for the French king.¹⁷ In it, the sultan hinted at his vexation. He upbraided his counterpart for attempting to leave diplomatic discussions in the hands of his consul in Salé, "because he [Estelle] is a merchant, and neither a great lord of your court, nor one of your principal officers, being not the work of merchants to confer with kings or to manage affairs between potentates." Since "the principal reason" for their diplomacy had been "about the slaves of your nation who are in ours," Ismail proposed a one-for-one exchange, a Frenchman for a Moroccan, but he added that only those taken captive in the last ten years should be considered.¹⁸

It is unclear whether the French government replied to this offer. Probably not, since a few months later Ismail, still simmering, sent along a second, equally peevish note to Paris. This letter, dated August 13, 1693, was for Saint-Olon. Hamamo delivered it to the Frenchman's stately home on the leafy Bois de Boulogne. As the Moroccan perched on a settee in the reception chamber, Saint-Olon pored over the translation, in which the sultan restated the frustrations of his earlier letter to Louis—the choice of Estelle and the limited scope of French intentions. He wrote that upon his return from a campaign, he had been very angry to learn of the emissary's departure. Ismail repeated his esteem for Saint-Olon and his high expectations for their collaboration, "but since you came only to speak of French slaves, and nothing else," he was fated to be disappointed. The jilted would-be ally was incredulous that "you came for the purpose of about two

hundred slaves.”¹⁹ Saint-Olon shook his head and set the letter down. He was surprised that the Moroccan ruler had failed to appreciate the importance of the French captives to any future Franco-Moroccan cooperation. He had thought Ismail a bit more astute.

Saint-Olon promptly responded. He provided Hamamo with a letter for Ismail, in which he attempted to soothe the wounded man’s pride with flattery, as he defended his honest intentions. He ended by urging the sultan to renew diplomatic efforts with France, and he pledged his assistance in that regard. Moulay Ismail let the matter drop, and the two never communicated again.

Moulay Ismail might have picked up his plume one last time had he read Saint-Olon’s travel-notes-turned-book, *L’Estat présent de l’empire de Maroc*. Published in Paris in May of the following year, it expressed the former emissary’s true sentiments. In one passage, Saint-Olon extoled the natural virtues of the land, the beauty and purity of the climate, the abundant pasturage, the sweetness of the waters, and excellent taste of the fruits and vegetables. But according to Saint-Olon, all that was wasted on the infidel, and he “deplored the tragedy of seeing such a rich treasure, buried, so to speak, in the center of laziness, ignorance, and inhumanity” that was Morocco.²⁰

François Pidou de Saint-Olon would later resurface during Abdallah Ben Aïsha’s time in France, when he would serve as an escort for the admiral. He also hosted a reception at his home for the Moroccan ambassador. However, by then his *L’Estat* had made its mark at Versailles, and there can be little doubt that it shaped the French king’s view of the Sharifan Kingdom—and, in particular, its ruler. In retrospect, it appears that the Franco-Moroccan diplomatic dance was over years before Ben Aïsha boarded his ship for Brest.

13

PAX ISMAIL

Evil qualities in man are injustice and mutual aggression. He who cast his eye upon the property of his brother will lay his hand upon it to take it, unless there is a restraining influence to hold him back.

—Ibn Khaldûn¹

The ruler sleeps on an anthill.

—Arab proverb²

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, Moulay Ismail was at the height of his power. He had ruled for twenty-eight years, longer than any Moroccan sultan in almost two centuries. His power was unchallenged, and the country was at peace. Ahmad Ben Mahrez was long dead, and his brother, Moulay al-Harran, had disappeared from the scene, probably killed as well. At fifty-four, the sultan was at an advanced age for the time, graying at the temples and losing his teeth, but otherwise he remained remarkably spry. The captive and anonymous author of *An Account of South-West Barbary* wrote, “As to his Person, he is a Mulatto of a dark complexion, and a very lean and thin Body, exceedingly Amorous, and as Eminent for the Sports of Venus as for his Martial Exploits. He is now about 55 or 56 Years of Age,

and yet as Nimble and Active as any one in his Dominions; and can Leap or Mount a Horse with the greatest Agility imaginable.”³

This author attributed Ismail’s remarkable constitution to diet and exercise, observing that the sultan ate modestly and abstained from alcohol, and wryly implying that his exercise was provided by his harem. Astounded by the sultan’s bevy of women and his “incredible Number of Children,” the writer observed that the sultan’s harem closely resembled Solomon’s, except that whereas Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, the reverse was true for Ismail. It mattered little to the author that Islam forbade having more than four legal wives. Like Ismail’s other Christian chroniclers of this era, this writer followed his imagination and wrote that Moulay Ismail “is said to lie with a Virgin every Night.”⁴ As the proverb went, a woman loves a man with her heart, and a man loves a woman with his needs.⁵ The old libertine was one needy soul indeed.

These days, Moulay Ismail certainly had more time to indulge in his pleasures. After returning from Algeria in 1701, he remained primarily in Meknes—to the delight of some, including his wives and concubines, and the chagrin of others. During these years, the output of his harem must surely have increased. According to accounts by two men who visited Meknes in the early 1700s, Father Nolasque Néant and the French consul, Jean-Baptiste Estelle, the harem produced, respectively, sixty children in one month and thirty-five children in forty-five days.⁶

The ruler’s women might have appreciated the attention, but the court and the foremen and their work crews were certainly less enthusiastic about the sultan’s increasingly sedentary ways. The latter were particularly inconvenienced, since the old man became even more immersed in his construction projects, lingering here and there to inspect and to dole out orders, praise, or punishment as the mood inspired him.

Moulay Ismail may have styled himself an architect-builder, but his most important contribution to his capital was to ensure a steady supply of labor and material. A reliable stream of criminals and rebellious tribesmen provided much of the former, and primary building material, such as straw and quicklime, was no problem. Decorative products, however, were

another matter. Though Morocco produced its own excellent ceramic tile, other items such as marble had to be imported, which was expensive. When this material ran short, the sultan scoured the countryside. The Roman ruins at Volubilis served as a quarry for years, and when that site had been stripped of its best stone, Ismail looked farther afield.

Eventually his eye fell upon the El Badi (The Incomparable) Palace in Marrakech, built by Ahmad al-Mansur between 1578 and 1594.⁷ This great complex had fallen on hard times, but it remained sumptuous enough to serve as the imperial residence of the former capital. Ismail, who had no more regard for the recent past than the ancient past, commanded that every adornment of the 360 rooms, the central courtyard, and the pavilions be stripped away, right down to the mud brick superstructure—which, along with the brackish water of the reflecting pools, is basically all that remains today. Here and there one can glimpse a patch of tiles that escaped the carnage, a bit of color that hints of expensive building materials used. But nothing remains to indicate the sheer scale of the intricate carapace, which consumed 67,000 square meters of carved plaster, 53,000 square meters of carved wood, and 10,000 square meters of glazed zellige tile work.⁸ Ismail vacuumed it all off to Meknes, along with the tons of Italian marble that, so it was said, had been traded pound for pound for Moroccan sugar.⁹ Moroccan historian el-Oufrani evoked the El Badi's former grandeur:

There was onyx of every color and white marble like silver or entirely black; the capitals of columns were covered in melted gold or in leaves of fine gold. The ground was paved in superb slabs of finely cut polished marble, and the wall revetments had ceramic coverings of many colors, simulating a network of flowers or a richly embroidered coat. Finally, the ceilings and walls were inlaid with gold; the walls were decorated with the same metal, being also decorated with brilliant sculptures and elegant inscriptions. In short, the El Badi was one of the highest and most splendid monuments to ever exist, and it surpassed the beauty of the palace of Baghdad.¹⁰

Preoccupied as he was, and wanting to educate his no-account spawns, around this time Moulay Ismail assigned key provinces to his principal sons, though he was careful to ensure that local military commanders continued to answer only to him. He assigned Moulay Ahmad to Tadla, Moulay Zaydan was sent to the Cherg, Abdelmalek received the Dra'a, Mohammad el-Alen got the Sous, and El-Mamoun, the eldest, got Tafilet. When the latter died in 1702, Moulay Yousef took his place. Each son received a contingent of Abid, between five hundred and three thousand men, probably to serve as an elite personal guard.

It did not take long for the first sign of trouble to appear. Within months of his assignment, Zaydan was sacked for making unauthorized incursions into Algeria, though he was soon rehabilitated, probably at the urging his mother, and given the plum assignment of Fez.¹¹ More problems followed, as Abdelmalek and another of Ismail's sons, Abou-Nacer, began to fight over the Derâa region. In 1703, Mohammad el-Alem rose up in the Sous, apparently driven by jealousy over reports of Zaydan's preferential treatment for the succession. El-Alem declared himself king of Taroudant and marched on Marrakech with an army of notoriously restive Sous Berbers. The governor of the city hastened a messenger to Meknes requesting assistance, but such was not forthcoming in time, and el-Alem's forces took the city on March 6, 1703.

Moulay Ismail summoned Moulay Zaydan and charged him with bringing his brother to heel. This was the prince's first field command since Algeria back in 1692, so he was eager to make good, but a decisive battle would elude him. By the time the prince reached Marrakech, the rebels had retreated to the Sous. The imperial forces advanced west and found al-Alem where they knew he would be, holed up at Taroudant. Zaydan put the place under siege, but it took three years to starve the city into submission. On June 4, 1706, the inhabitants finally gave in. Despite whatever assurances they were given for their safety, Zaydan put most of them—men, women, and children—to the sword. For the second time in a generation, the capital of the Sous was made a ghost town.

Mohammad el-Alem was sent in chains to Meknes. He could have been under no illusion about his fate. It must have come as a surprise, however,

when, just before reaching the capital, he was hauled before an ax-wielding black. Moulay Ismail had ordered that his son suffer the amputation of a hand and a foot as punishment for his transgressions. The prince survived the initial trauma, but he developed complications, perhaps gangrene or some other infection, and died within two weeks of his amputation, surely having received no comfort from Papa in his final hours.¹²

The Sultana rejoiced, for her precious son was now the unchallenged presumptive heir. Moulay Ismail never made it official, but Zaydan's place in the succession was clear enough, despite the prince's predilection for alcohol. Moulay Zaydan's star was at its apogee, but that would not last long. In October 1707, word reached Meknes that the prince had died. According to *al-Zayyânî*, he was murdered by an assassin in Taroudant, but a more diverting version has him being plied with brandy and smothered in bed by a group of his wives.¹³

With Moulay Zaydan's death, Lalla Aïsha's long reign of terror receded. She had at least one other son, Moulay Ahmad, but he was a pleasure-loving inebriate with dubious prospects. There must have been a half-muffled cry of joy within the great feminine warren at Meknes, and out at Tafilet among the older women, as the news of the great comeuppance circulated. No more would she be seen strutting through the halls of the harem, administering her petty punishments. Rather than conspiring for the downfall of some perceived rival—an accusation of infidelity was the usual ploy—her energies were spent cultivating sympathy for her rootless circumstances. The novitiates alone would listen, and only for a while. The sad old crow would linger until 1715, when her passing inspired only ambivalence.¹⁴

Occasional dustups between princes aside, the land was at peace. Moulay Ismail achieved something unique among Moroccan dynasties—the domestication of the Berbers. Until his time, the relationship between the ruler and the mountain people had been one of grudging accommodation. As one historian put it, “The sultan was content to let the remoter regions well enough alone, since it was too expensive to retain direct control over unproductive areas. He only required that the caravans go through, that the bandits did not close the passes, and that his leadership of the community

be recognized in Friday sermons.”¹⁵ The mountain tribes had been accustomed to periodic incursions into their lands, but occupation? Never.

Thirteen years and multiple campaigns later, Moulay Ismail had brought most of these tribes under his control and, at least for a time, altered their existence. Their wings, so to speak, were clipped. Bereft of horses and firearms, the Berbers had no military capacity. Once more, their only true means of common action, their zawayā, were returned to local houses of the occult, and the network of forts and Abid garrisons would ensure things remained that way.

The Berber problem had largely ended with the grand campaign of 1691, when Moulay Ismail had directed his most complex military operation. He had assembled at least thirty thousand troops, plus dozens of Christian artillerists and guns that had been captured at Larache. His target was the last three refractory tribes of the Fazaz, the Aït Malou, the Aït Afalma, and the Aït Isri. Dividing his army into three columns, he had surrounded these tribes and utterly destroyed them. Al-Nāṣirī described the carnage:

After a terrible struggle, the Berbers were cut to pieces and dispersed into ravines and valleys; at each pass they found soldiers blocking their way and cannon fixed upon them. The men were killed; the women and children taken prisoner; their affects were pillaged; the animals and beasts carried off; the horses and arms taken as booty. The fighting and pillage lasted for three days, during which the soldiers searched for the Berbers here and there in ravines and valleys, and they routed them from grottos and caves. The sultan ordered [his generals] to collect the heads of the dead ... They collected all they could find: there were more than 12,000 heads, in excess of 10,000 horses, and more than 30,000 arms.¹⁶

Moulay Ismail’s success was not universal. As previously discussed, following the Fazaz campaign, the sultan had tried his fortunes once more in Algeria. Between 1692 and 1701 he had been thrice repulsed—at the Moulouya River at the hands of the Ahmad Châbane, at Oran, and finally at

the Djedioua River. Taken together, they had constituted a reality check to Moulay Ismail's regional ambitions.¹⁷

In the north, military operations against Spain were ineffectual and gradually waned. Sometime after 1696, the Moroccans broke off operations at Melilla. As for Ceuta, following the last major assault in 1695, there had not been much fighting. The sultan had left Ali Ben Abdallah in charge, but the general seemed to have appreciated the hopelessness of the task. The bulk of his troops were tribal levies, completely unsuited to that kind of warfare. Since these contingents were rotated annually, most men simply went through the motions of fighting until their time was up. Ben Abdallah had lacked naval forces, so there had been no way to bypass the enemy's impregnable position on the isthmus. Accordingly, the attackers had confined themselves to mining, punctuated by occasional artillery bombardments, and the Spanish had responded with counter-mining and raids against Moorish positions.

Ismail had sent several letters to Ben Abdallah, threatening him with death if he did not take the city, but he had never carried through with the threat. Years had gone by with no change to the tactical situation, even during the War of Spanish Succession, when Spanish priorities—and the powder and shot that Ismail's forces had acquired from the English at Gibraltar—might have provided a window of opportunity for the Moroccans. Instead, the siege fizzled to a blockade. The governor of Tétouan continued to man the trench lines but with a skeletal force. This complacency doubtless contributed to the rout of 1721. John Braithwaite described the final phase of the operation:

The Blockade of Ceuta consisted of between 4 and 5,000 men, drawn from the neighboring Country, and relieved every Month. This was a great Grievance to the People, because all that time they were obliged to find themselves as well in Ammunition and Provisions, and their Taxes were not in the least abated for this Service. Besides the Country People, the Bashaw had between 3 and 400 Blacks of the King's, whom he was obliged to maintain at his own Expense; and therefore served as a Body Guard, and to keep the others in subjugation.¹⁸

Lesser conflicts still simmered. Now and then, Berber revolts flared and were suppressed. And in Fez, Moulay Ismail's long campaign against the ulama finally boiled over in 1708. When the religious leaders once again refused to provide him written support for his creation of the Abid, Ismail ordered his governor to confiscate their property. One particularly troublesome scholar, Abdesselâm ben Hamdoûn Guessous, was thrown into prison and, it was alleged, strangled on the sultan's orders. It was an act so controversial that even al-Zayyânî, who was normally reticent in passing judgement, observed that it was "regrettable for Islam."¹⁹

As the years went by, the question of the succession came up with increasing frequency, but Ismail waved off such queries, usually without comment. Sometimes he could be heard to growl, "I have no sons." It was a remark that must have dismayed everyone within earshot. What he meant, of course, was that he had no son whom he considered worthy of being his heir, though many sons had come and gone over the years. More than a few were dead: el-Alem, Zaydan, Abou Nacer, killed by Arabs tribesmen in the Sous in 1713; Moulay Bou Merouan died while making the hajj.²⁰ Most were boys of forgotten concubines, whose names he never learned before they vanished to the date farms of Tafilet. Those princes who remained at court—Abdelmalek, Moulay Ahmad, and Moulay Yousef—were disappointments. However, more sons would come, and surely one of them would be worthy of the bay'ah.

14

THE REDEEMER

All things, from whatsoever lawful source they may come, the Brothers are to divide into three equal parts. Insofar as two parts will be sufficient, they are to provide for carrying on the works of mercy, as well as provide for a moderate sustenance for themselves and the required domestics. The third part is to be reserved for the ransom of captives who are incarcerated for the faith of Christ by pagans: with a reasonable price paid either for their ransom or for the ransom of pagan captives, so that afterwards by a reasonable exchange and in good faith a Christian may be ransomed for a pagan according to the merits and status of the persons.

—from the Rule of St. John of Matha, approved by Pope Innocent III¹

Morocco, 1712

The date was March 17, and it was wet, blustery, and miserable. In short, a typical late winter day on the Mediterranean. As he prepared to climb into the dory that would take him ashore, Father Dominique Busnot felt a familiar sense of gloom, for he held no illusions about what lay ahead. He prayed that this time there would be a breakthrough, but he doubted it. This was the third time he would set foot in this miserable country, and he prayed to the Almighty that it would be his last.²

But then Busnot admonished himself to suppress these dark thoughts, recalling instead his sacred duty and the suffering of the hundreds of Christian souls—mostly men, but also some women and children—who were languishing in the prisons and workshops of the Moors. Many had apostatized and thus were beyond redemption. They would burn in hell, may God have mercy on them.

The rain was steady now, and the sea was playing along with gut-churning swells. Ahead loomed the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, a murky outline of hills and sloping battlements barely visible through the downpour. The anchor chain clanked and rattled as it was paid out and the ship settled. Soon Busnot was following the others down the rope ladder and into the small craft. Seated in the stern were a few of the twenty-two Moorish captives they had brought along from Marseille. Tethered together by wrist and ankle, the wretched fellows shivered under the wool cassocks the priest had supplied to cover their rags. These lucky infidels had been freed from the galleys to be exchanged for twenty French captives being held in Tétouan.

The four oarsmen labored through the surf. As the rain shifted in and out of their faces with the wind, the men pulled the hoods of their wool cassocks lower and clamped them to their chests with their chins. By the time they hauled the craft onto the beach, they were soaked to the skin and shaking fearfully.

Busnot hated this kind of winter; cold and snow bothered him less than rainy, dreary days. This weather was all too familiar to him, reminding him of his birthplace in Rouen, Brittany. He loved everything about that city, especially the great gothic cathedral whose glory had inspired him to join the priesthood, but he was done with those depressing winters. The climate of Paris was only marginally better, of course, but the buildings there were better equipped to deal with the penetrating dampness.

Greeting them on the beach were an envoy from the governor and several men-at-arms. Introductions were hastily made. Busnot presented Father Valombre, minister of state of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and Captives. The two of them were Trinitarians, as the order was commonly called. Saint John de Matha had founded the order in 1193 for the purpose

of liberating Christian captives. A third priest was in their company, Father Nolasque, of a Spanish order dedicated to the same purpose, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, or simply the Order of Mercy.

The envoy escorted the priests up the beach to a sea gate, while a group of the soldiers remained to receive the second boat carrying the rest of the Moorish captives ashore. Pending the exchange, they would be locked in the bowels of the fortress.

Ceuta was still under siege. In the days that followed, the priests toured the Royal Walls. They took note of the modern fortifications, which incorporated the latest designs of the trace italienne: low masonry walls fronted by earthen slopes to deflect incoming shot; triangular bastions that provided artillery positions with interlocking and enfilade fire; and defense in depth, including forward gun emplacements linked by long trench lines that hindered the Moors from tunneling and/or digging approaches to the walls.

The defenses were indeed impressive. To penetrate into the city, the Moors would have to overcome three main defensive lines that sat astride the finger of land that connected the peninsula with the mainland. The first was characterized by three large triangular bastions, and behind that was a courtyard, the Plaza des Armas, which ended in a high wall with embrasures for thirty cannon. Beyond that was a moat connected by drawbridge to the final defensive line, a massive wall with positions for about thirty more guns. It looked impregnable, but in 1695, a surprise attack under fog had almost succeeded, and the Moors had briefly captured the plaza before a counterattack drove them back. Since then, however, the siege had been more of a bother than a threat.

From atop the third wall, Busnot squinted through the morning haze, his left hand raised to shield his eyes from the sun. The Muslim lines stood a respectful distance away, but close enough to make out the fascines of their artillery redoubts. Now and then, they would launch a few shells, but it was desultory fire that did not much inconvenience the people of Ceuta, who were now nearing two decades of this land blockade. Even the garrison seemed blasé about the threat, as the thinly manned defenses indicated.

Busnot had been assured that units were at the ready, but the heavy lunchtime drinking he witnessed suggested otherwise.

It appeared that the greatest nuisance to the people of Ceuta was the rising cost of living, a consequence of the English occupation of Gibraltar in 1704. This port had been the primary line of communication between the mother country and the enclave, but after 1704, the port of Tarifa, several kilometers to the west, served that purpose. Although closer to Ceuta, Tarifa was exposed to the strong winds of the Strait, unlike the well-protected port at Gibraltar, and so it was a difficult anchorage for many sailing ships. After 1704, fewer vessels made the crossing to the enclave, the volume of goods imported declined, and prices rose. At the same time, the blockade made trade with the Moors all but impossible. These economic hardships took their toll, and the last of the older generations, namely the Portuguese, drifted away. Spanish settlers moved in behind them, into their homes and businesses, but they also grew tired of eking out a living in the back of beyond. Soon they too would be leaving.

Despite the privations, those who remained bottled up in Ceuta probably felt fortunate to avoid the real war that had been going on in much of Europe for more than a decade. The so-called War of Spanish Succession had been triggered by the death of the childless Charles II, the last Hapsburg emperor of Spain. When the ailing Charles willed his vast holdings to Louis XIV's grandson, the balance of power in Europe was rocked to its core. England, the Netherlands, Austria, and several states of the Holy Roman Empire had formed a Grand Coalition to prevent France from becoming the preponderant force in Europe.

In that respect, the war had succeeded. France had been stymied. But in every other way and for every nation involved, the conflict had been a disaster. It seesawed across Iberia, Italy, and the French frontier, leaving in its wake widespread destruction, loss of life, and economic ruin. Without sufficient financial resources upon which to draw, the warring states had been forced to borrow heavily to fund their campaigns, and most were now in serious financial straits. However, cooler heads had finally prevailed. France and England had come to terms, and a congress between the

combatant powers was underway in the Netherlands to discuss a general settlement to the war.

The war had been in its early stages when Busnot had first come to Morocco back in 1704. During his second mission, four years later, the war had been at its peak. Now the war appeared to be petering out, but the challenge remained the same. With so much of Europe in ruins, Busnot and religious orders such as the Trinitarians sometimes found it hard to justify to potential donors the need for charity for a few captives in a distant land when there was so much suffering at home. The war had made fundraising a greater challenge than ever.

The lapse in diplomacy had also eased the pressure on Moulay Ismail to address the issue of European captives. Before the war, in the earlier years of Ismail's reign, France, like a number of European powers—notably Spain, Portugal, England, and the Netherlands—had begun to lean on the Moroccan ruler to negotiate the release of their countrymen held in captivity. They had offered presents and large cash payments, but their success had been uneven. Paris had sent multiple emissaries, and these efforts had generated much vaporizing about goodwill and trade; however, beyond a handful of released captives, they had produced nothing tangible. These parleys were as the Moroccan ruler had intended them to be—a tease.

Moulay Ismail wanted to keep the Europeans coming back with their expensive gifts and ransoms, but he hesitated to part with his European captives, for he prized their building prowess, which the typical Moorish prisoner lacked. Most of the European captives he had offered up for release were old and infirm, but the Europeans had persisted, at least until the war focused their attention elsewhere. The task had then reverted to the charitable organizations, who had enjoyed some success in places such as Algiers and Tripoli, where European captives belonged to individual slave owners. But Morocco, where the ruler monopolized the business, remained a monumental frustration.³

Yes, the Moroccan ruler was a special case, *une vraie merde*. Despite acknowledging Moulay Ismail's “extraordinary genius,” Busnot hated dealing with the man. And the sultan's lifestyle was anathema to a man of God.⁴

Father Busnot's first trip to Morocco had begun in Salé in the winter of 1704. He traveled in the company of the French consul Périllier and two other priests named Forton and Toëry. The three-day ride to the capital gave Busnot the opportunity to see a bit of the countryside, and it was an eye-opening experience. He was impressed by the fertility of the land and the excellent fruit, but he thought the agricultural potential of the region was not being sufficiently exploited by the lackadaisical Moors. Furthermore, the poverty and ignorance of the country people appalled him. At the douars, where they passed the nights, the people had few possessions and even less clothing, and many children cavorted about naked. The country people also were superstitious; Busnot recorded that after his party departed each morning, locals purified the areas where they had slept with smoldering branches and incantations. Just how Busnot came upon this information, he failed to mention.

The journey to Meknes also hinted at the tenor of Ismail's rule, for fear of the sultan reached into even the humblest village. At each douar, in the morning before the group's departure, the village chief would ask if the Christians had lost anything since they had arrived. No property had gone missing? Their horses and donkeys were all accounted for? Good, because the sultan had declared the village chief responsible for security of all travelers in his domain, so he was liable to be executed for any transgression—kidnapping, assault, or robbery. Such was the means Ismail employed to suppress brigandage in the interior.⁵

Busnot's group rode east along the south bank of the Bou Fekrane River, arriving at Meknes on November 19. As they approached from the west end of the city ramparts, the first of Moulay Ismail's great monuments they beheld was the Bab El Khemis, a horseshoe gate adorned with layers of blue, green, and brown tile inlays, juxtaposed by two mammoth flanking towers. The entire effect was diminished by a shantytown that spread out in the foreground, as if disgorged from the great cavity. Busnot's group picked a path through the hovels and a pack of filthy, barefoot urchins who mobbed them, screeching for baksheesh. Thus far, Busnot was unimpressed:

The streets are unpaved, and one is always suffocated by dust or mired in mud. At first, one encounters the Jewish quarter where the streets are wide and the shops are stocked with merchandise; but in the rest of the city, the streets are enclosed by two ramparts with several openings here and there where one finds only poor artisans or fruit vendors, because the houses have no opening on to the streets. [At the end of the roads] one finds ruins produced by the caprices of the king who ceaselessly destroyed [to make way for his constructions] and made powerless the inhabitants to rebuild, even to repair, having taken away years before their brick ovens. This led to the appearance of a large number of hovels one sees outside the gates of the city, built of reeds, that form neighborhoods, and shortly engulf the place. The people here are very poor and are crushed by taxes. It is said that the king, since the start of his reign, always refused to go there for not wanting to offer them any relief.⁶

Just inside the gate, the party was met by a scowling little man and a group of soldiers. The djellaba soiled with red earth several inches above the hem accentuated the guide's diminutive build. He stood in absolute contrast to the backdrop of lean, blue-black brutes of Moulay Ismail's slave army.

A short walk took them to the Pavilion of the Ambassadors, just inside the palace complex. The party weaved its way through the field of air ducts over the Habs Qara and into the adobe building with its peaked green tile roof. Inside they were greeted by Abdallah Ben Aïsha, the corsair admiral of Salé—or “Benache,” as Busnot referred to him. Ben Aïsha had served as Ismail’s ambassador to France in 1699, so although a savage, he knew enough to serve refreshments to his guests. Also lingering in the wings were the three Spanish Franciscans that Madrid supported to minister to the captives, the father superior and two monks. Farther back, along the walls, were several leaders from among the captives. Ben Aïsha and Périllier sipped tea and nibbled on dates, while the presence of the captives hung like an odor in the room.

In fluent Spanish, the Moroccan assured his guest that he would be given an audience soon and advised that they hold themselves in readiness. Until then, the Jewish residents of the city would see to their needs. He

admonished Périllier to keep a tight rein on his team, for they must not circulate in the city until authorized to do so.

The days passed in idleness. One afternoon they were visited by Abraham Maïmoran, chief of the Yiddish community of Meknes, a royal favorite and, according to some, the sultan's pet Jew, a dubious distinction that had once belonged to his father, Joseph. It had been the elder Maïmoran who alerted Moulay Ismail to the death of his brother, Moulay Rachid, and urged Ismail to ride immediately to Fez and claim the imperial treasury and the throne. As Busnot was later told, Joseph Maïmoran was subsequently murdered on Ismail's orders, lest he become too powerful.

Abraham Maïmoran was an impressive figure, tall and stately in his black woolens and matching turban. He had a high forehead and a bony nose, a manicured beard, and a stiff, rather stooped bearing that made him appear older than his years. His speech echoed his posture, deliberate if not stilted. Busnot was no fan of Jews, but he liked Abraham instantly. He found the man to be empathetic, and most importantly, he was deft at Ismail's game. How else could the man have survived for so long in such an unforgiving place and with such responsibilities! Businessman, leader of his people, and responsible for their taxes and good behavior. He was also a kind of foreign affairs adviser to the sultan. Why, the fellow was even responsible for virtualizing the palace, no small endeavor for this greedy metropolis.⁷ Saint-Olon estimated the population of Meknes at about sixty thousand people.⁸ Of that number, perhaps five thousand lived in the Palace City, but those five thousand probably ate twice what the rest of the population consumed.

Other visitors came by to visit with Busnot and his traveling companions—a few courtiers, foreign traders, and Christians who had “gone Turk,” like Rodani Gaillard, a Frenchman who ran the sultan’s armory. They visited Busnot out of boredom or, like the Jewish children, curiosity, and they often were interested in news from Europe. One man who would loom large in Busnot’s Meknes experience was another renegade, the sultan’s doctor, an Andalusian formerly named Laureano, who now called himself Sidi Acmeth.⁹ Although that fellow found Ismail’s favor for his remedies, Busnot learned that Acmeth had few friends at court. He had a reputation

for being a duplicitous backstabber, and the Christians in particular hated him for his haughtiness and cruelty. One time when a priest had pleaded with Acmeth to be more sympathetic to the plight of the Christian captives, the doctor had replied, “Having refuted the Master [the Christian god], I have no regard for his subjects.”¹⁰

For upright men such as Busnot, Acmeth was a distasteful archetype of the grasping courtier—perfide, cupide, opportuniste—but he was worth cultivating as a source of information. The best nuggets and anecdotes about the sultan and the inner workings of the makhzen would be had from men such as Acmeth and Maïmoran. Other than his brief audiences, Busnot had no such exposure. Presumably Acmeth’s and Maïmoran’s observances about the history of the dynasty, the sultan, and the kingdom are baked into Busnot’s own experiences in his account, *Histoire du règne de Moulay Ismail*, published in Paris in 1714.

Given the nature of his work, Father Busnot’s *Histoire du règne* contains a good deal about the condition of Christian prisoners in the Palace City.¹¹ His description echoed that of Germain Moüette of thirty years earlier. Busnot also provided partial casualty figures for the Christian captive population. According to him, during Moulay Ismail’s reign—probably up to Busnot’s last visit to Meknes in 1712—six hundred Frenchmen had died in captivity of various causes and another five hundred had broken down and apostatized.¹²

Busnot’s primary focus, however, was on the tyrant himself, and like most Christians, the priest had a closet fascination with the sultan’s sex life. Between sacreblues he lapped up every anecdote and rumor. He was told that in addition to the four wives the sultan was allowed according to his faith, the old reprobate had some five hundred concubines.¹³ Why, it was an industry, provisioning the great man’s bedchamber! The principal ministers, great shaykhs, and tribal chiefs provided their daughters, and corsairs and slave agents acquired foreign talent.

It was bizarre that with such a bounty, the sultan should be governed by the oldest and least attractive of the lot, Lalla Aïsha, the imperious Sultana Zaydana. Busnot described her as a terror—cruel, petty, and vindictive. She ruled the roost in the malevolent style of her husband, waddling down the

harem corridors in the company of an armed eunuch, administering punishment as it pleased her. Zaydana's disposition, Busnot understood, was in large part the product of her environment—a perverse biosphere in which a woman's worth was determined by whether she had birthed a prince or princess, a place where power was expressed in petty torments visited upon rivals and newcomers. Zaydana's physical state also explained much, for she was repulsive—old, creased, and corpulent. It was inconceivable that she had once been so desirable that Moulay Ismail, the old tightfist, had consented to purchase her for sixty ducats!

Of the sultan's other wives, Busnot was told of only one, the sultan's other favorite, an unnamed Englishwoman who had been taken hostage as an adolescent and sold in one of the slave markets. Busnot called her "affable and honest." Only the sultan's two favored wives had the ability to go into town or move about the palace more or less at will—of course, suitably clothed and concealed. The rest of the sultan's women, his wives and concubines, were designated spaces in the harem and eunuchs to carry their messages and attend to their needs. Each remained in her gilded cage, engaged in her needlepoint or music, simply marking time until the master's next visit—or until he gave permission for her to circulate, even to visit with a neighbor. Otherwise, the only thing most of them could anticipate was being put out to pasture to the "cold" harems of Fez and Tafilet, which was the practice for concubines when they reached the age of thirty. At this time, the woman was retired and free to grow fat and enjoy her children, who were exiled to the same locale. This is how the harem was replenished and the child population held in check.

The latter was a particular consideration at the Palace City of Meknes, for the place was crawling with them. Busnot was told there were some six hundred of the ruler's children living in Meknes, though he did not specify when he received this figure. The old lecher was nearly sixty years old during Busnot's first trip to Morocco, yet he continued to churn out babies at a stunning rate. The priest was told that forty children had been born in the harem during the three months before his first visit—and that was only counting the boys. He claimed that the girls were smothered at birth, allegedly to save space in the harem.¹⁴

According to Busnot, the little devils ran amok in the palace. The boys received attention—way too much of the wrong kind of it—from their mothers, because the sultan was an absentee father. On occasion he stopped by the harem to see a new baby, and at times he would cradle a young child or walk hand in hand with a son or daughter around the palace, but such was rare. Moulay Ismail was gone too long from the palace, and in any case, there were just too many offspring to keep track of. He had probably given up counting them, let alone learning their names, many years earlier. Their education was thin, mainly religious and lacking in the practical. Pampered, lacking in discipline, and undereducated, Ismail’s children acquired bad habits. They learned to lie, cheat, steal, and abuse their servants and others of the lower classes. No one dared to report on them.¹⁵

In addition to his lascivious side, Busnot was fascinated by Ismail’s maniacal temper. Although he did not record personally seeing the sultan strike down anyone, Busnot dutifully repeated stories from others—for instance, that Moulay Ismail had killed with his own hands more than thirty thousand people since the start of his reign.¹⁶ Some of the stories bordered on comical, such as the sultan’s execution of one of his cats. According to the tale, the creature was tortured and executed for eating one of the ruler’s rabbits. One of the Abid dragged the cat through the streets of Meknes by a cord around its neck, whipping it as he called out, “This is how my master treats mischievous cats.” And then its head was cut off.¹⁷

Busnot noted Ismail’s unexpected traits. In his personal habits, for example, he was rather ascetic. His meals were simple, traditional fare, eaten in the old way, seated on a carpet and by hand, and he drank only water. Though he often changed his attire as many as three times a day, Ismail dressed simply. He usually wore a shirt with sleeves rolled up, a kaftan or vest, and a burnous, a hooded cape common to the Barbary nations.¹⁸ His passion for animals, too, showed a softer side of the man.

Like other Western firsthand observers, Busnot also remarked about Ismail’s reputation for being miserly. Although the sultan poured the wealth of his kingdom into his building projects, he was loath to part with a single dinar for anything else. Busnot wrote, “He loved money to an excess and his main occupation was to amass useless treasure. He imposed enormous

taxes on his subjects, of whom he took everything leaving nothing for the upkeep of his home, for which the Jews were charged, or for the army, obliging the Moors to make due, without giving them clothes or arms or pay or food.”¹⁹

Heavy tax policies were nothing new in Morocco; however, Ismail’s fundraising was characterized by a unique randomness. He wielded the power of the purse like the power of the sword. Busnot related two cases in point, the first of which seems credible because it was almost certainly told to him by his Jewish hosts. In theory, Jews were protected in Morocco so long as they paid their head taxes and followed the rules, but in reality they were from time to time targeted for special treatment, including extortion. Moulay Ismail enjoyed toying with people, and the Jews were natural marks. One day, being in a playful mood, he called the Jewish leaders in Meknes to his palace. “Dogs,” he addressed them in familiar terms, “I call you before me to have you take the red bonnet and embrace my Faith; for more than thirty years you have amused me with the coming of your Messiah. I will see him come, or if you do not tell me precisely the time and place, there will be neither property nor life for you. You will deceive me no more.”

The Jewish notables traded sideways glances, and their robes shifted with their feet. A wretched minute went by, and then one of them spoke up and begged a week to confer with their experts and provide an answer. The sultan fixed them with his gaze, letting them stew for a while longer. Finally, grudgingly, he agreed.

The Jewish men knew their prince. There would be no time wasted in consulting wizened rabbis, ancient texts, or oracles. They came up with a plausible answer quickly enough and then spent the rest of the week raising money and other gifts.

When Jews returned to the audience chamber, they brought with them cash, gold, jewels, and sundry treasures. Their answer to Ismail’s question was that Hebrew scholars had determined categorically that the Messiah would come in thirty years and would delay no longer.

The response came as no surprise to Moulay Ismail. He must have suppressed a smile as he conjured bile. “I hear you, dog of deceivers,” the old despot sneered, “you think to lull me to sleep in hope that I will not be alive at that time. I will cheat you in my turn. I will live long enough to be convinced of your deception and to punish you as you deserve.”²⁰

According to another story, in 1705 Moulay Ismail ordered Moulay Zaydan to lead an army of thirteen thousand Abid and take back Marrakech from Mohammad el-Alem. When no money was forthcoming from the imperial treasury for food, forage, powder, or shot, preparations ground to a halt. Eventually a few brave officials came to the palace to plead for money for provisions, at the very least. The sultan cut them short, “I knew well that you were worse than dogs. Moorish dogs, do the mules, camels, and all the other animals of my empire ask of me something to eat? No, they find it without bothering me. Do then the same, and march off with diligence!” He was eventually prevailed upon to yield a modest purse to the army, but it was not enough to spare the villages and douars on their route of march from being ravaged and looted.²¹

Such tales of Moulay Ismail’s excesses and eccentricities animated Dominique Busnot’s idle days at Meknes until November 21. Toward midday, a French captive sent by Ben Aïsha came to their quarters to convey the royal summons. The Frenchmen prepared themselves hastily, and a group of twelve French captives was formed to carry the presents the Christians had brought for the sultan.

They found Moulay Ismail seated on the floor of one of the broad esplanades that ringed his palace, dressed in a simple white kaftan and matching turban, a burnous that had been hiked up to cover his chin, and pointed yellow slippers. As was often the case when he was not mounted, Ismail sat cross-legged on a mat, his legs naked below the knee. Behind him stood about thirty members of his black guard, armed with sabers and muskets, and a diminutive servant who held a parasol to shield him from the sun. The royal scribe sat on his heels before the ruler, and on each side of him were arranged four of his ministers, seated barefoot and bareheaded.

At first the business seemed straightforward enough. With Acmeth acting as translator, the customary flattery was exchanged, and then the gifts were

offered and accepted with due courtesy. The sultan explained himself ready to exchange prisoners head for head. Admiral Ben Aïsha would see to the details. And that was it. Success!

Of course, it was not to be so easy. Though they were themselves neophytes in dealing with the Moors, they had heard enough from others to know better. It should have come as no surprise when, on the following day, Ben Aïsha dropped by the Frenchmen's quarters and announced that the price had gone up to three Moors for every Frenchman. And then, with typical impudence, he badgered the Christians to provide additional gifts to the sultan—the first of many such requests by Ismail's ministers over the next few days. Busnot and his brothers were appalled. They conferred well into the evening and then countered with a new proposal—to purchase the captives for one hundred francs each. The sultan refused.

After much back and forth, each time with additional Moorish demands for gifts, the Frenchmen determined to appeal to Paris for guidance. It was decided that Forton and Toëry would return to France, while Busnot would wait at Salé. Before they left Meknes, Ben Aïsha extended one of his master's customary olive branches: since Ismail was pleased with their gifts, he would condescend to allow the delegation to take away the more decrepit prisoners.²²

Douze hommes! Twelve from the 150 Frenchmen in captivity.²³ Busnot's only satisfaction was knowing that this meant twelve fewer graves to dig among the six hundred already in the ochre fields bordering the city's southern ramparts.

They sailed, the priests Forton and Toëry and their wheezing charges, from Salé on December 21. The joy that might have accompanied the event was stifled by the absence of the eldest of the former captives, the eighty-year-old Pierre Beloni, who was deemed too sick to travel. He had been twenty-six years a slave, and he would die three days after his friends cruised to freedom.²⁴

Busnot's second mission, in 1708, was the most bizarre and frustrating. He returned to Morocco in July of that year, accompanied this time by a new French consul, whose name he did not mention, and six French merchants.

One of the latter was Étienne Pillet, who would serve as lead negotiator for the French delegation. The role of the other merchants is unclear, but they probably had some business in the Moroccan capital. In their baggage were many gifts, including a large diamond, an emerald, a topaz, and more, all worth 2,200 piasters. Also tagging along was Diego, a Spanish priest who was to negotiate the purchase of Spanish captives. Father Diego was a frequent visitor to Meknes and had already negotiated terms with the sultan's intermediary, Acmeth. A squat, jocular fellow, the Spaniard's naturally high spirits were further buoyed by the late arrival of additional ransom funds. With this purse, Diego boasted, he would liberate all the Spaniards!

Departing from Salé on July 25, they made good time and arrived at Meknes on the evening of July 27. As before, the party was lodged in the Jewish quarter. Much to their surprise, the summons came the next day. This was an encouraging sign; however, negotiations quickly foundered when Diego attempted to bargain for another two hundred captives. Acmeth balked at this, arguing that only the oldest and infirm should be ransomed. Diego tried diplomacy, but the conversation soon grew heated.

Ismail, not one to tolerate dissent in his presence, lost his temper. He growled at Ben Aïsha and ordered that two hundred Spanish prisoners be brought out. At length, the black guard herded a large group of anxious-looking prisoners into the courtyard. As they were prodded into line, Ismail threatened to massacre them all right then and there, which caused Diego to slip into his most ingratiating self. After a few minutes of the priest's base groveling, the sultan ordered the Spanish captives—whose expressions had changed from confusion, to terror, and finally to relief—returned to their work. The terms were shortly settled at a hundred Spaniards, of course the aged and feeble, for which the chagrined Diego agreed to a whopping fifty thousand piasters. Placated and doubtless pleased with his business acumen, Ismail threw in another seven Spanish captives as gifts.

Ismail then turned his attention to the French. "You are not reliable," he announced, "for you have failed in your word to release my captives from the galleys. And your expectations," he continued, "were wholly unreasonable." Then he focused his ire on Pillet: "Father Diego, like a

vassal, brings me from time to time rich presents, for which he sometimes receives slaves; sometimes, he gets nothing. But you others”—he waved a bony finger between Pillet and Busnot—“you contrive to get all your slaves at one time. This is not accommodating for me.” With that, Moulay Ismail dismissed the party.

Back in their somber lodgings, Busnot felt a familiar despair, though optimism had died earlier this time around. He wanted to leave then and there, but of course they had to try again. The Frenchmen bickered; they heaped abuse upon poor Diego, since the fellow’s bungling had certainly undermined their diplomacy. They prayed, and they drank.

Days passed as Pillet worked the corridors of power for another audience with the sultan. To demands for more gifts, he offered vague assurances. Finally, on the sixth day, Acmeth and Ben Aïsha stormed in and announced that the sultan would release at least half of the French captives. Could it be true? What was the catch? Pillet, Busnot, Leyron, LeBlanc, and the others were still discussing the matter late that afternoon, when other officials arrived to say that the sultan had ordered the French delegation to leave Meknes immediately on pain of death.²⁵ It was insane.

Their Jewish hosts were empathetic. They provided the Christians with food for the return journey to Salé, and their sons helped load the donkeys. The sultan, Abraham Maïmoran explained, was mercurial but not stupid. Perseverence! He would come around. So they retreated to a douar outside Meknes, where they waited while Pillet gamely tried to renew negotiations with the sultan. The extortion for more gifts continued. It was grinding, and the wine was running low.

On August 6, the party was obliged to move again when their douar caught fire and burned down. After this incident, they determined to return to Salé to await further developments. The next day, a rider caught up to them with a note from Pillet. He had finally made some headway with Ismail in beseeching him that his mission’s failure would mean ruination before his king and country. Ismail, apparently empathetic for once, had relied, “Be patient. I will give you five slaves for the gifts of your papas, and I will also give you twenty-five of the oldest.” Twenty-five? Was Pillet fous? It was hardly a coup, even if the offer was serious. The party proceeded to Salé.²⁶

Negotiations continued into October, and the news from Meknes was dizzying. Two days after Pillet penned of the potential release of twenty-five captives, he wrote that Ismail had again changed his mind. He would consent to only ten captives and two families, the latter apparently being people of some stature who had been captured at sea on their way to southern Spain. A few weeks later, when Abdallah ben Aïsha turned up in Salé, the French upped the ante with an offer of three hundred piasters and one Moor for each Frenchman. Still, that was insufficient. In the end, the sultan released to Pillet nine captives purchased at an “exorbitant price.” After two months of the most vexing parleys, Ismail concluded the business with the imperiousness that only he could conjure. In the end, he had done them a favor. “Pillet,” he wrote, “for love of you, I perjure myself, in giving you slaves that I had sworn never to sell or to release.”

And so the ransom purse that had been years in the making was spent. On October 26, Busnot and his party, which included the nine captives, sailed for Cadiz along with two additional Frenchmen who had purchased their own liberty, as well as a Venetian, and a recently baptized former Jew.²⁷ Once safely in the harbor, Busnot’s mind turned to more mundane concerns of reputation. He wondered what Grégoire de La Forge, the Minister General, would have to say about this latest failure. Certainly there would be condemnation from the brothers whose duties never took them far from Paris, and sniggering from those fortunate enough to negotiate with more reasonable savages such as the Turks and the Tripolitans.

Two missions. Twenty-one captives. Such results hardly inspired confidence, so no one was more surprised than Busnot when nearly four years later he was selected for a third trip to Morocco. Perhaps the Minister General and his advisers considered the importance of experience in dealing with the Moorish leader—or maybe no one else wanted the assignment.

Now, on this first day of April 1712, standing atop the highest part of the Royal Walls, Busnot again considered the dubious plan: an exchange of prisoners across battle lines from a city under siege. And they were dealing with a new set of intermediaries, the Spanish authorities at Ceuta and the local Muslim commander, Ali Ben Abdallah. The terms were fairly equitable, at least by Ismailian standards. In exchange for the release of

twenty of their countrymen being held in Tétouan, the French had agreed to the twenty-two Moors and a quantity of silver. Father Valombre and his party were there to execute the transaction and explore the possibility of additional prisoner exchanges.

Things had not gone well thus far, which was no surprise to Dominique Busnot. For some reason, the negotiators preceded their funds, and when Ali got wind of this, he yelled of duplicity. To demonstrate his displeasure, his forces stepped up their bombardment of the walls, which went on for several days. The Spaniards kept their heads down, drank, played ombre, and threw dice. Fortunately, this was but a temporary setback. In time, the shipment of money arrived from Spain, and the Muslim guns fell silent. Under flags of truce, discussions began over the details of the exchange.

Busnot was cautiously pessimistic right up until the morning of April 27, when Valombre and Ben Abdallah completed their transaction in the no-man's-land between the ramparts of Ceuta and the Moroccan redoubts. The bedraggled captives—some beaming, others weeping, and all wiry and weather-beaten—passed in opposite directions into similar embraces and hoots of joy. Ben Abdallah saved his broadest smile for the three mule-loads of coin. Once the Christian party had returned to their lines, he ordered a thundering artillery salvo in celebration.

The priests departed Morocco the following month, but their mission was not yet at an end. They had decided to linger in Spain while collecting additional funds and looking for new opportunities to purchase captives. Before their departure, Ben Abdallah had opined that the sultan might be amenable to the release of another thirty to forty captives for a similar ransom. So they passed the summer in Cadiz, squirrelling away coins, writing hopeful letters to the headquarters in Paris and their agents in Morocco, and waiting for an opportunity that never materialized. Finally, on September 5, they gave up and sailed for Marseille.²⁸

Years of groveling for every sou, braving the Barbary corsairs thrice, a near-death experience at the hands of Moorish thieves outside Meknes, and more—all for a mere forty-one captives, most of them used-up men of dubious character. But it was God's work, and so it had counted for something. His own redemption, at the very least.

But it would not end there for Dominique Busnot. He could not get on with life without publishing this account of his experiences with Moulay Ismail and that pestilential place, Morocco. Cognizant that others had preceded him, Busnot's account aimed to update those of Moüette and Saint-Olon for a new generation of readers. Moreover, Busnot had personal reasons for undertaking such a project, for he felt compelled to raise the consciousness of his countrymen to the plight of the captives. Also, he probably found something therapeutic in recounting his bitter experiences and exposing the tyrant for the devil that he was. In his *Histoire du règne*, Busnot summed up Moulay Ismail as succinctly as any Westerner of his time:

One may rather admire such a prince who has reigned so long by means completely contrary to the rules of politics. Hated by his subjects who lose their heads once they have passed for rich, feared by his officers and the principals of his Government whom he often beats like the lowest slaves or are killed by him with his own hands at the slightest whim, odious to his own children, whose infinite number load down the State with so many little tyrants who divide and tear apart the land with their continuous factions ... treating Christians and all nations with such barbarity, ruining merchant by his affronts, overwhelming with excessive work those who have the misfortune to fall into slavery, playing with all the Christian princes, always ready to conclude treaties with them without ever executing the same, liberal in granting passports and prodigious in words to attract envoys to his State under the color of peace, commerce, and for the liberty or redemption of captives, but ingenious in finding pretexts to elude the conclusion of the same as soon as the first audience has been purchased by rich presents, boasting with impunity his control over all nations of Europe, finally, as a true son of [the Prophet] Ismail, of whom he claims descent, armed against all, it is rather strange that he reigns peacefully and that, up to now, no one is armed against him.²⁹

15

THE SATISFIED

Manners are of more importance than laws. The law can touch us here and there, now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation like that of the air we breathe in.

—Edmund Burke¹

Morocco, 1721

On May 3, a glorious day in early spring, Commodore Charles Stewart came ashore at Tétouan. He had crossed over from Gibraltar, where he had ridden out the winter on the joyless Rock. Those four months had been sheer tedium, spent mostly in the few decent public houses that had popped up over the preceding decade. One was as nondescript as the other, with their threadbare décor, flat brew, and chewy meat pies. Only the occasional seaman from far-off places enlivened the days. The Rock was, in a word, claustrophobic. The enclave was barely seven square kilometers, and most of it was a limestone promontory. The base of the mountain provided a bit of real estate for the few permanent structures, mostly military barracks, storehouses, and Royal Navy workshops.

Off-duty options for soldiers and sailors were limited. Of course, there were the requisite pubs and bordellos with their familiar diversions. One of the

principal pastimes for officers was shooting game birds: pheasants, partridges, ducks, and geese. Absent such quarry or anything better to do, a man might amuse himself in blasting away at swarms of shearwaters and petrels hovering over the water in search of prey. When a man grew truly stir crazy, he might take to hiking through the kilometers of tunnels that military engineers had bored into the Rock during the siege. The lights of Malaga beckoned across the bay, but travel into Spain was impossible. Anglo-Dutch forces had taken Gibraltar in 1704 during the War of Spanish Succession, and it had been ceded to the British under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, but the Spanish kept the place under virtual siege. Stewart and his men were eager to conclude their business and be home by spring.

Stewart's mission was to finalize the treaty of friendship that he had signed in January with the sultan's representative, Moses Ben Hattar, a Jewish merchant whom Moulay Ismail employed from time to time on diplomatic assignments. Stewart's instructions from Whitehall were to conclude the negotiations by presenting the Moroccan ruler with a ratified copy of the treaty and a letter from the king. The ambassador was also to secure the release of all Englishmen held in bondage in Meknes.

The English retinue included several aides, guards, servants, and musicians. John Windus, a minor diplomat among the group, would record this mission for posterity in his 1725 chronicle, *A Journey to Mequinez, the Residence of the Present Emperor of Fez and Morocco: On the occasion of Commodore Stewart's embassy thither for the redemption of the British captives in the year 1721*. Windus's book, the final Western firsthand account published during Moulay Ismail's life, would be the most scathing rebuke of the Moroccan ruler.

Hamet Ben Ali Ben Abdallah, the local pasha, greeted the delegation. Stewart had intended to depart for Meknes as soon as possible, but they were delayed several weeks mainly because of the arrival of news that Salé corsairs had seized two English ships. Stewart refused to continue to Meknes until the situation was put right, which, in time, it was.

Like most foreign visitors, Windus liked Tétouan for its "very good air" and fine, whitewashed houses. He remarked upon the oddities, such as the near

absence of windows in the dwellings, the lack of a proper port to service the city, and the dearth of wagons to transport goods, most goods being moved about strapped onto horses and mules. He also noted the general poverty of the inhabitants, how the commoners were “next-kin to Slaves” to the almighty pasha, who, according to Windus, ruled and doled out crumbs with the parsimony of a feudal lord.²

With Ben Abdallah and Ben Hattar as escorts, the group departed for Meknes on June 13. They took a westerly route through Ksar el-Kébir, Souk El Arbaa, and Sidi Kacem. The pace was unhurried, and the stops were frequent. As they neared the capital, they passed the holy city of Moulay Idriss, an important pilgrimage site. Being infidels, they were forbidden to enter the city, so they continued to nearby Volubilis, where they paused for a few fours to walk among the ruins. Windus surveyed the site and rendered a few sketches.

They arrived in Meknes at sunrise on July 3 and made their way through the sleepy streets to the Palace City. At some point, they were welcomed by one of the sultan’s ministers. Then Ben Abdallah escorted Stewart to his lodgings, a house belonging to the pasha, but two days later, Ismail ordered the ambassador relocated to a more opulent home owned by Ben Hattar. Early the following day, July 6, Commodore Stewart was summoned for his introductory audience with Moulay Ismail.

Charles Stewart, forty, was a member of the nobility, a politician, and a naval officer. Being fifth son of a viscount, Charles knew early on that he could not depend on his father’s estate for his livelihood, so he had left home as a youngster to seek his fortune where any proper English gentleman of his circumstances would—at sea. Over the next two decades, he saw more than his share of action in three wars, and he had the wounds to prove it—including, at sixteen, the loss of his right hand during an action against a French warship. Stewart rose through the ranks, eventually commanding a frigate in the Mediterranean. A few years later, he turned to politics and entered Parliament in 1715. Sir Charles had a knack for politics, but when the Admiralty offered him command of a squadron against the Salé corsairs, he leapt at the opportunity. He probably later regretted his decision once he learned that his mission was primarily

diplomatic. Stewart was determined to do his duty, but he must have had his doubts about the feasibility of his task. He had heard of how the Moors regarded treaties, and he doubted the old tyrant would condescend to read even one of the document's articles, let alone all fifteen.

Nevertheless, duty called, so it was stiff upper lip. Impeccable deportment and manners, along with English style, Stewart felt, would be his best weapons on this assignment, so he determined to make an impression at his first audience with the sultan. The commodore turned out in full naval fig, resplendent in a long blue frock coat with enormous gold-laced buttons, gilt epaulettes, and white breeches, topped by a tricorn hat. He rode a great black horse and sat a saddle gaudy enough to impress any Moor. Close at hand on each side were several footmen in livery, and bringing up the rear was the rest of the official party and, lastly, the servants. Preceding the group were two mounted sergeants and several fifers and drummers. Stewart wanted his entry to be jaunty, and the little ensemble puffed and tapped nonstop through the medina and into the Palace City. It created quite a sensation among the locals, many of whom had to be knocked out of the way by the Abid escort.

When they arrived at the Bab Mansur, the music stopped, the delegation dismounted, and Ben Hattar led the way on foot into the imperial city. After a short walk, the group came to rest at a pavilion in the Ksar el-Mhanncha. There they waited about a half hour before being moved to another courtyard where the sultan was waiting.

Moulay Ismail was immediately identifiable, the only figure wearing a headdress and sitting atop a jet-black horse. He wore a white turban and clutched a lance in hand, as was his custom. Several dozen musket-toting bodyguards were drawn up around him in a half-moon formation, and a slight black man held an umbrella over the royal head. Off to each side stood a clutch of his ministers, barefoot and bareheaded, looking more like slaves than men of influence. Stewart struck up the band again, and his group marched forward until it reached a distance of about eighty meters from the sultan.

Then the sultan's daft side made its appearance. Suddenly, and with surprising agility for a man of his age, Ismail leapt from his horse and

prostrated himself in prayer on the ground. Stewart glanced over at Ben Hattar, who remained stoic. The sultan was motionless for what seemed like several minutes, his face so close to the earth that Windus noticed dust on his beak when he rose. Then remounting his horse, Ismail again took up his lance, and Ben Hattar stepped forward and motioned for Stewart to accompany him to the sultan. The officers fell into a single rank behind the ambassador and marched forward. Windus described the man before him:³

The Emperor is about Eighty Seven years old [he was really around 75], and very active for such an Age. He is a middle-sized Man, and has the remains of a good Face, with nothing of a Negroe's Features, though his Mother was a Black; he has a high Nose, which is pretty long from the Eyebrows downwards, and thin. He has lost all his Teeth, and breaths short as if his Lungs were bad, coughs and spits pretty often, which never falls to the Ground, Men being always ready with Handkerchiefs to receive it. His Beard is thin and very white; his Eyes seem to have been sparkling, but their Vigor decayed through Age, and his Cheeks are very much sunk in.⁴

Stewart drew up, removed his hat, and bowed. His officers did the same. “Bono, bono!” came the reply, and the sultan motioned for the ambassador to replace his headgear. Smiling, the commodore stepped forward and held out a silk pouch, which he announced contained a letter from his king.

“I have come,” Sir Charles announced, “at His Majesty’s request, to settle a treaty of peace and friendship between our two crowns.” Of course, he had also brought a present, which he hoped Moulay Ismail would accept. The sultan promised that Stewart would have everything he came for, since he loved the English. It was the usual niceties, but even so, Stewart was finding it hard to stick to script, since Moulay Ismail tended to cut him off any time he pleased, which was often.⁵ As the two leaders chatted, Windus continued his inspection of the old despot:

His Negroes continually fann [sic] and beat the Flies from his Horse with Cloths, and the Umbrella is constantly kept twirling over his Head, the Man that carries it taking great care to move as his Horse does, so that no Sun may come upon the Emperor. His Dress is not much different than what his Basha's wear, when out of his Presence, consisting of a fine Alhague [probably a burnoose], his Turbant [sic] was made with rolls of Muslin, that came very low upon his Forehead; the end of his Cymitar [sic] hung out, it was cover'd with Gold, and handsomely set with large Emeralds; his Saddle was covered with Scarlet Cloth embroidered with gold, with one Pistol in a Cloth Case, on the left side.⁶

By the time Windus returned his attention to the conversation, Stewart was starting to broach the subject of captives—how England had no Moorish slaves, and he hoped the sultan would show the same regard for England and allow the captives to return home. Charity, after all, is becoming of a great monarch, and such an act would be evidence of the sultan's regard for the English nation! However, Ismail continued to batter the commodore's delivery with his comments and questions, and the interpreter was clearly struggling to keep up.

“No, Your Majesty, England is in no particular want of manpower,” Stewart explained. “Why, every year she has some 100,000 men at sea. But more than a question of commerce, this is for my master a concern for the goodness to his people that his subjects in captivity be allowed to return to the wives and families.”⁷ With that, Stewart handed over the silk pouch containing the treaty. Appearing most pleased with the business, the sultan promptly announced that as a sign of his regard, he would permit the commodore to choose nine English captives to take away with him that morning.

The interview thus concluded, Ben Hattar took Stewart on a tour of the palace complex. They walked through the various plazas of the Ksar el-Mhanncha, passing palace after palace, stopping to inspect a few storehouses and the armory. Windus loved the intricacy of the tile and plaster work, but what really left an impression was the sheer expanse of the place. He had never seen anything on such a scale, and all looked

freshly stuccoed in reddish earth. There must have been a dozen miles of walls running their loops around the complex—and all built by slave labor! In many places, they came upon gangs of workers, no doubt some of them Englishmen, scraping and tamping mortar into place, while other men hauled buckets or mixed fresh batches of the mix. Their bare chests and backs glistened in the summer heat, and the occasional pink body identified the newcomer. It disgusted Stewart and his men, infusing them with a renewed sense of purpose.

After about three hours, they headed back to their quarters. To escape the heat, they took a special lane the sultan had constructed under a lattice, over which draped thick vines that shaded its half-mile length. The sultan often rode his chariot here, though it was, as Windus was told, “drawn by women and eunuchs.” Why the sultan chose this means of locomotion when he had several thousand horses at his disposal can only be guessed at. Perhaps it was beneath the great man to look upon the rear end of an animal or deign to watch it defecate.

They came upon Moulay Ismail near the armory, still seated on his horse and lance in hand. He greeted the ambassador with his usual “Bono, bono!” and asked how Stewart liked his palace. Stewart replied that it was among the noblest on earth. “Alhamdulillah!” the old man replied with a toothless grin. He then turned his attention to a group of young captives, boys assigned to the armory, groveling before him and offering the standard supplication—Allah ibarik phi amrik, Sidi (God bless thy power, Master)—into the dust. Through an interpreter, the sultan asked the boys where they were from, and told they were English, he commanded them to see Stewart back to his quarters.⁸

Whatever optimism Stewart had when he came away from his first audience with the sultan must have faded as the days and then weeks went by with nary a word from the palace. At least the delay offered Windus plenty of time to gather information from the courtiers, priests of the priory, Jews, and captives with whom he came into contact. He wrote about everything, from how the Moors prepared and ate couscous to how they cared for their horses, but like most Christian writers, he paid special attention to the sultan’s peculiar nature.

Ismail's sex life was the stuff of legend. At an age when most men were impotent and had one foot in the grave, the old beard-splitter was grinding through his stock of "many thousands" of concubines, most of whom he discarded after the first use.⁹ "He seldom bestows his Favors on a Woman more than once," Windus wrote, "unless she proves with Child, for then she becomes in greater Esteem, and stands to partake of his Bed again." They were all eventually put out to pasture in the provinces to live out their days in seclusion.

Equally disposable were the children of these women. According to Windus, Ismail had some seven hundred sons "able to mount a Horse" and an unknown number of daughters. The sons lived at the palace until they reached the age when "he is apprehensive that they may be too busy about the Women." The sultan's sons from his four wives might find themselves assigned to some important regional post or military command, but those of the concubines generally shared the fate of their mothers. In the best cases, they were sent east to subsist on a date plantation; in the worst cases, if the mother died or fell out of favor, they were turned out of the sultan's care entirely and left to fend for themselves.¹⁰

As interesting as it was, the sultan's sex life could fill only so many pages. Windus's real fascination was the violence of Ismail's court and the imperial thugs, the Abid al-Bukhari. He had never experienced anything like a terror system of government and the general degradation it engendered. His Journey to Mezquinez focuses on these subjects and thus merits amplification here:¹¹

I cannot avoid observing on this Occasion, that a man seldom makes so true an Estimate of his own Country, as when he views it by Comparison with others. Thus it happened to me during my Stay in Barbary, where it was natural for me to make such Reflections, as much of course arise to an English Subject, who having lived in the justest, mildest, and best-tempered Government in the World, is transported to one in every Respect the reverse, where a fierce and unbound Tyranny and Oppression have destroyed the very Distinction between Right and Wrong, and perverted all Ends of Society.¹²

Nowhere was this perversion more evident than with the Abid. Windus could not fathom how the slaves who enforced these excesses served with such loyalty, especially when one considered the abuse their master heaped upon them. He observed, “He [Ismail] beats them in the cruellest manner imaginable, to try if they are hard; sometimes you shall see forty or fifty of them sprawling in their own Blood, none of them daring to rise until he leaves the Palace, where they are lying.”¹³

Windus concluded that the Abid were conditioned to endure torment, and given any opportunity, they returned it in spades:

He [Ismail] takes care to lay the Foundation of his tawney Nurseries, to supply his Palace as he wants, into which they are admitted when they are very young, are taught to worship and obey this Successor of their Prophet, and, being nursed in Blood from their Infancy, become the Executioners and Ministers of his Wrath, whose terrible Commands they put into execution with as much Zeal and Fury as if they had received them immediately from Heaven. Their manner is (as soon as the Word comes out of his Mouth) to seize on the Wretch ordered for Execution like so many Lions, whom (if he is not executed on the spot) they almost tear to pieces before he gets to the Place of Execution; and by their Fury of their Looks, and their violent and savage manner using him, make a Scene very much resembling the Picture of so many Devils tormenting the Damned.¹⁴

Naturally the Christian captives, being the lowest of the low, received their share of abuse. When he was at court, the sultan toured the construction sites daily, and woe to the man who looked to be shirking. Windus continued:

His [Moulay Ismail's] Wrath is terrible, which the Christians often felt. One Day, passing by a high Wall on which they were at work, and being affronted that they did not keep Time in their Strokes, as he thought they should, he made his guards go up and throw them off the wall, breaking their Legs and Arms, knocking them on the Head in a miserable manner. Another time, he ordered them to bury a Man alive, and to beat him down with the Mortar into the Wall. Nor is the emperor less cruel to the Moors, whom he'll frequently command to be burnt, crucified, sawed in two, or dragged at a Mule's Tail through the Streets, till they are all torn to pieces.¹⁵

The abuse was not reserved for slaves and captives. It was general, as Windus indicated in describing the daily gathering of the court.

About eight or nine of the Clock, his trembling Court assembles, consisting of his great Officers and Alcaydes [caïds], Blacks, Whites, Tawnies, and his favorite Jews, Memaran and Ben Hattar, all barefooted; and there is bowing and whispering to, and t'other Eunuch, to know if the Emperor has been abroad [probably meaning outside of the palace or of Meknes] (for if he keeps within Doors, there's no seeing him, unless sent for), or if he's returned in a good Humour, which is well known by his very Looks and Motions, and sometimes by the Colour of the Habit he wears, yellow being observed to be his killing Colour; from which they calculate whether they may hope to live twenty-four Hours longer. If he comes out, their Necks are all held out, their Eyes fixed on the Ground; after this manner the crouching Creatures pay their Homage. If he speaks, some swear by their God that what he says is true; others at every Pause he makes, cry out, "God lengthen thy Days, my Lord; God bless thy Life."¹⁶

One of the more vivid of Windus's horrific stories involved the unfortunate Larbe Shott (probably a phonetic interpretation of a Muslim name). This fellow, a member of Ben Abdallah's retinue and described as being descended from an old Andalusian family, had traveled with the group

down from Tétouan. According to Windus, he was executed on July 19, on the sultan's orders and in the cruelest manner imaginable. Tied between two planks, he was sawed in half from his head down to his pelvis. The man's transgression, as Windus was told, was that he had lived in Christendom for several years without the ruler's permission. The fact that he had been sent by the pasha to a merchant in Gibraltar as hostage pending the payment of a debt made no difference. It was further alleged that during his stay, Shott had engaged in heretical activities, including cavorting with infidel women and consuming alcohol, which meant the fellow's fidelity to Islam was suspect. When such reports reached Ismail's ear, he reacted swiftly. Whether Ben Aballah made any efforts on his servant's behalf was not recorded.¹⁷ Although the English delegation almost certainly did not witness this gruesome event, they knew the man, and no doubt it shook them considerably.

The sultan's cruelty extended to the harem. He murdered women about whom others in the harem complained, and on occasion he lost his temper and also killed the complainers. For the gentler sex, strangulation was preferred. His black executioners carried a loop of rope attached to a stick. The loop was thrown over the head and the stick twirled until the victim suffocated. Windus claimed that Ismail murdered his women liberally, sometimes as many as thirty in a day.¹⁸

Windus reported that Ismail often forgot that he had murdered or ordered the execution of someone. According to Windus, the sultan would often ask about someone he had noticed missing, only to be told he had been killed. "Who killed him?" the tyrant would ask. "To which they feel compelled to answer that they do not know, but suppose God killed him. If he chances to kill anybody when he was not determined upon their Death (as frequently happens) he civilly begs their Pardon, and says, he did not design to kill that poor Man, and lays the Fault on God, saying his Time was come, the Powers above would have it so."¹⁹

Perhaps it was a sign of age or senility, but that was beside the point. Absolutely no one, except perhaps Zaydana, was safe, not even the occasional royal favorite. Windus was told of one incident when Ismail murdered a fellow named Hameda, once a much-loved companion. The

sultan had noticed Hameda on a military campaign and awarded him a horse for his actions in battle. The jocular Hameda also proved entertaining, and soon he was a frequent presence at court. He even had the exceptional privilege of walking with the sultan and his wives in the garden. Despite oft-repeated declarations that he could never be truly cross with his favorite, one day Ismail struck Hameda with multiple blows from the butt end of his lance. Then the remorseful sultan rushed in a doctor and paid him handsomely to save the poor wretch, but Hameda's wounds were too severe, and he expired the next day.²⁰

Windus had just about run out of ink by the time the sultan at last agreed to a second audience. On July 23, after a wait of more than six weeks, Sir Charles received his summons. If such was possible, the wait had been dull and stressful at the same time. After all the macabre stories, Shott's execution, and the perfunctory abuses, large and small, Stewart and his men were eager to conclude their business and be gone.

The second audience began much the same as before, with Stewart, Windus, and the rest fifing and drumming their way to a plaza in the imperial city. This time, however, the sultan had assembled quite a crowd. Ismail was standing beside his horse in the foreground, with a gaggle of courtiers just behind him on either side, and farther back a phalanx of his black guard. Seeing them approach, the sultan mounted his horse and saluted them with "Bono! Bono!"

Dressed in customary blue naval splendor, Stewart walked to within several paces of Moulay Ismail, removed his great tricorn hat, and bowed. The officials in his retinue followed suit. Hats were tucked under arms, and the sun began to bake their wigs and warm their scalps. Stewart tried not to allow his gaze to shift to the crowd of ragged creatures standing behind a row of black soldiers, but his pulse quickened. Was Ismail about to cave? Steady on, he told himself.

The sultan's gaze locked on the Englishman, and Stewart met his stare. They were two contrasting figures: one imperturbable and serene, and the other like a warrior prepared for battle, lance in one hand and reins in the other, astride a horse that acted the same, stomping and shifting as if eager to be off.

Moulay Ismail raised his voice to an uncharacteristic pitch, as if addressing everyone assembled and not just the ambassador and his party. The sultan clarified that he had not realized Stewart had full negotiating powers; instead, Ismail had believed that Stewart came to prepare the way for another ambassador.²¹ This was, Stewart assumed, an attempt to explain the sultan's stalling tactic over the subject of the captives. Their brief interview went something like this:

Ismail: "Now that I find that you have sufficient authority from your king, I declare that you shall have all your countrymen to take home with you." When this was translated, a murmur of "God be praised!" and other utterances arose from the ragged ranks. Some men fell to the ground and others began to weep. Stewart could not avoid being distracted, but he quickly returned his attention to the old fox. Was this some kind of trick?

Ismail continued: "And because of the esteem I have for this ambassador and England, and in recognition of their love for me and my house, I further declare that no Englishman will remain in captivity any place in my realm, now and forever." With that, Ismail waved his hand, and the black guard began to herd away the captives. This took a few minutes, because many men had to be raised from the ground. Some looked confused, as if they expected to be set free that very moment, and they recoiled at having to return to the slave pens.

For Stewart, the desperate glances cast in his direction were all too familiar, though a bit more pronounced to be sure. They reminded him of what he had seen on the faces of those left behind—wives, girlfriends, mothers, and children—as they cast one last glance at a loved one as the ship pulled away from its moorings. For all too many of them, it was indeed a last glance, such was the seafarer's life. But that was a fleeting thought, and Stewart quickly refocused. As the captives receded from the scene, he said, "I humbly thank your majesty for this honor, and I will endeavor always to uphold your interests when I have returned to England."

Moulay Ismail replied, "Indeed? We shall then see how well you deserved the present [the captives] I gave you this morning." He paused, and the two men observed each other in silence for a moment, neither knowing what more to say. Finally Moulay Ismail concluded the interview: "I wish you a

safe return home. May Allah bless you! Allah bless you!”²² And with that, he turned his horse and trotted away, his retinue running after him.

Somewhere among them was a rather incongruous light-skinned young man with a sullen face. Thomas Pellow was an English captive and, for the past four years, had been a renegade in the sultan’s service. Having gone Turk, Thomas was excluded from the possibility of freedom, no longer of concern to jolly old England. He seemed doomed to live out his days in this infernal land.

As Stewart watched the captives disappear around the corner of the palace, he knew they were all thinking the same thing—that it had been too easy. What trick did the old devil have up his sleeve? He admonished his officers to make ready to depart as soon as matters were prepared for the trip.

Over the next few days, Stewart asked the priests to draw up a list of the English captives. He was much gratified with the number—more than three hundred—but he was at a loss as to how to move and care for such a host. Many were too weak to make the trek by foot to Tétouan. That said, he wanted to be off as soon as the logistics could be arranged, because when the tyrant got around to thinking the matter over, he might change his mind. This exodus was going to make a sizable dent in the sultan’s foreign labor force, which would be reduced to about eight hundred Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Genoese captives.²³ Already Ismail was reportedly a bit miffed at that prospect. The captives related how, on the morning of Stewart’s second audience, the sultan had been in a foul mood, striking several of his officials with his lance and drawing his sword to strike at another, and one caïd had been tossed.²⁴

Four days later, on July 27, as soon as enough wagons and victuals could be assembled, Stewart, Ben Abdallah, and an Abid escort hastened the motley group of ex-captives out of Meknes. These men knew that they were not yet free, for they had to survive the summer heat and the arduous two-hundred-plus-kilometer trek to Tétouan. Many of the weakest set out with the understanding that they would probably not make it.

They retraced the route over which Stewart had traveled weeks earlier. Presumably it was this view of the countryside that led Windus to the

following observation about the predatory nature of Moroccan government and how it stifled economic growth:

It is indeed a thousand Pities that the Government of this Country is such that discourages Industry and Improvement, for it is a delicious Climate, the Soil generous and fertile ... If the Government would but countenance Industry, or at least allow everyone to enjoy the Fruits of his Labor, the Land would be capable of producing a hundred times the Consume of the Country; I have heard judicious people say, that the hundredth Part is not tilled ... But, on the contrary, if a poor Man should get a Pair of Oxen to plough, he would not only be liable to be robbed of them by the next little mercenary Governor, but forced to sell his Corn to pay an arbitrary Tribute. For which reason the Land has no Proprietor above two or three Leagues around a Town; and if you spy two or three small Cottages, you may be sure they belong to some Alcayde [caïd], and the poor People who live in them to till the ground are his Servants, and like the Cattle, receive no other recompense for their Labour but the wretched Provender they eat.²⁵

Despite abundant water and a leisurely pace, the heat and exertion were more than some—the older men, sick, and most malnourished—could endure. After a few days, the pace slowed to a crawl as stragglers struggled to keep up, and the wagons filled to capacity. Men began to drop, and the dead were buried roadside. The situation was such that Stewart called for a pause at Ksar el-Kébir, where the caravan spent a few days to gain strength for the final, strenuous Riffan leg of the trip.

Somehow, most of the men made it. Windus did not record how many died on the road, only that 296 survivors staggered into Tétouan on August 12. There they spent a few days recuperating and scanning the northern horizon and the sea. With each passing day, anxiety mounted, for no man could unwind while they remained in this malignant land. So it was with indescribable joy that one afternoon, sails were sighted making for the port. As word passed, the ragged forms congregated at the city's edge. Windus waited with them as Stewart rode forth to reconnoiter. Once again, he

marveled that so many had survived. Had it not been for the smiles, they would have bested the paupers of a London workhouse as the most wretched lot he had ever seen.

Stewart returned a few hours later. It was indeed an English ship! The Moors, however, were not done with their cruel games. For days, Ben Abdallah delayed their departure—Windus indicated that the governor was awaiting a shipment of powder from Gibraltar that had been promised as part of the captives' ransom.²⁶

At long last, toward the end of August, all was in readiness for the departure. Stewart ordered the ex-captives assembled at the base of the massif. Despite the summer heat, they marched in good order to the port, escorted by the pasha and a small force of cavalry. The brigantine rode high at anchor, the British White Ensign tickled to life by an intermittent breeze. Awaiting them on the stony beach were four longboats and their crews. As the embarkation commenced, the pasha and the commodore chatted amiably, the stress of the past weeks having been lifted. By late afternoon, all were aboard, and Sir Charles, in the last of the longboats, took his leave of Ben Abdallah—and a good riddance too!

As Stewart mounted the quarterdeck, he noted the tattered mass overflowing the forecastle deck, their faces turned toward the sea. The longboats were hoisted up, the anchor was raised, and the boom clattered as the main sail swung into place. Slowly the ship gained sail as the hands feverishly worked the halyards. The gaggle remained oblivious to the activity around them. Their eyes, Stewart surmised, were fixed upon the Spanish horizon and the distant peaks of the Sierra Nevada. As the sun dipped behind the promontory of Ceuta, the mountains flashed a regal exit. Africa, behind them now, at least for the moment, faded away in the gathering darkness.

16

THE APOSTATE

As for the faithless, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them anything against Allah. They shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it [forever].

—Qur'an, 3:116¹

Morocco, 1719–1729

It was sometime in 1719. Thomas Pellow sat on the marble floor, his back resting against a smooth part of the cedar wood door.² It was dark in the palace, but for the pools of light cast by oil lamps like his own. The air was still, and only the faint cackling of roosters, which never seemed to stop, could be discerned. He began to drop off to sleep.

Looking at Tom Pellow, one would not take him to be fifteen years old—nor an Englishman, for that matter. He was tall for his age and big-boned, and three years of captivity had weathered his visage and added to his appearance of manhood. With his bald cranium and Moorish dress, the woolen djellaba and pointy slippers of animal hide, he blended in with the other palace lackeys. He was part of the furniture now.

Thomas's saga had begun three years earlier, in the summer of 1716, when he and his shipmates had been taken by Salé tin corsairs on their return

voyage from Genoa to Falmouth. Thomas should have been in school, but he had convinced his parents that a few months of duty on his uncle's ship would be just the thing for a rebellious preteenager—a growing experience. The truth of the matter was that Thomas hated his Latin school and longed for a bit of adventure. A growing experience he would have, and before he finally left Morocco, adventure enough for a few lifetimes.

In taking to the western Mediterranean that year, they had sailed into something of a trap. Unbeknownst to Thomas and a thousand other Englishmen eager to ply the rich ports of Italy and southern France, the Moroccan sultan had secretly abrogated the truce with England and unleashed the corsairs anew. Aboard the *Francis*, John Pellow, his uncle, had a crew of six, not counting young master Thomas, and not a firearm between them. To say they were easy prey was a gross understatement.

The captives trod the familiar path of misery, from the foul slave pens of Salé and on to Meknes, where they were put to work on the sultan's palaces and ramparts. Because of his age, Thomas was sent to the armory as an apprentice. He was fortunate. Within six months, four of his former shipmates, including his uncle, had been starved and worked into an early grave.

Certainly Thomas had his share of trauma. He had been beaten by a mob, starved, tortured, forced to convert to Islam, and humiliated in a public ceremony of circumcision. But through the strength of youth and a degree of luck, including the opportunity to study Arabic, he was not only above ground but had regained his health and most of his weight. He could not say, however, that his prospects were improving. He had discovered that turning Turk did not mean freedom, and proximity to the sultan brought its own hazards. Whether troweling atop the walls or holding the sovereign's parasol, survival here was a day-to-day affair.

Lately Thomas had found himself in quite a pickle. Some weeks earlier, for reasons that were not entirely clear, he, Tom Pellow, had been appointed guardian of the last door leading to the harem apartments—a eunuch's task if ever there was one. It was unprecedented, but Thomas suspected he knew why. One of the sultan's wives, Halima el-Aziza, had taken a fancy to him. Despite the chamberlain's admonishment to never allow himself to be seen

by the sultan's women, one day Lalla Halima had surprised him during a stroll through the palace grounds. Her brief glimpse of the rangy English lad had apparently been enticement enough, and the brazen creature had asked the sultan for him, purportedly as a servant and playmate for her young son, the prince Zaydan. But Thomas knew whom he was really to entertain, and victuals and rest be damned, for the highest scaffolding in Meknes was a safer place to be than near the harem.

Fortunately Thomas had yet to receive the summons to the harlot's chambers, but it was only a matter of time, and then where would it end? There were thirty-nine of them, the sultan's women, cloistered down the hall. Giglers, bored randy, like the rest of the purdah population.³ Notwithstanding the sultan's vigor, he was but one pitted against their hundreds, and with his gums and spittle, the old codger was hard enough to look upon fully clothed.

After a few moments, maybe more, Thomas was shaken awake by a sound from behind. A door closing? Footsteps approached and stopped. The iron knocker struck once loudly, then tapped a few more times. Thomas challenged, "Who comes here?"

"Moulay Ismail," came a muffled reply.

Thomas recognized the manner of knocking, as well as the raspy voice, but he wondered if Ismail was testing him. This visitor was violating protocol, according to which the appropriate harem guards were forewarned of the sultan's visit, which usually occurred before dusk. Thomas estimated that the time was now getting on toward midnight. Their exchange, which Thomas recorded in his chronicle, went something like this.

"You may not enter," Thomas declared. He explained that he doubted the visitor's avowed identity. Moreover, the sultan never came at such an hour or unannounced. The knocking resumed, faster now, so Thomas raised his voice and repeated, "You may not enter!" He said that should the intruder persist, his instructions were to discharge his weapon into the door after the third request had been refused.

Flustered, Moulay Ismail did not know whether to try the carrot or the stick. “No, no. Do nothing of the kind. It is indeed I. And if you do not open the door at once, I shall certainly take your head tomorrow. On the other hand, if you admit me, I shall give you the most splendid horse from my stable with a beautiful saddle and other rich accoutrements.”

At this point, Thomas knew there was no going back. To admit the sultan now, in contravention of his orders, would just as likely get him tossed and killed on the spot. Might as well double down. “Sir,” he shot back with a bravado he did not feel, “I will not admit you for all of the horses and equestrian equipment in the empire, for as I am entrusted and commanded by the renowned Moulay Ismail, the most glorious emperor in the world, to keep this post inviolable against all imposters and intruders, and as I believe you are such, I will not on any terms open this door and violate that trust. It is therefore in vain that you persist.”

A tantrum announced itself on the opposite side of the door, and the knocking resumed with greater emphasis.

There was nothing else but to play it out. Thus resolved, Thomas aimed his blunderbuss, a kind of early shotgun, at the door, though well away from the sound of the pounding, grimaced, and squeezed the trigger. The wood exploded and splinters shot everywhere. The reverberation through the palace was tremendous. The odor of black powder burned his nostrils, and he sneezed. Thomas cast a backward glance down the murky corridors. No movement, not yet—but the entire place would be awake and moving shortly to investigate. Thomas prayed that Ismail would retire before his humiliation became public.

He leaned into the door and listened. Nothing. Seconds passed. Thomas fingered the abused panel of door, which had been chunked but not penetrated. Then he heard the old man, cursing and muttering something unintelligible, but Thomas got the gist of it: You will rue your actions on the morrow. Slippers shuffled off, and the grumbling receded. And none too soon, for a few minutes later, the chief eunuch, an enormous heathen with a pox-marked face, came bounding down the corridor at the head of four sword-toting blacks.

The blacks were incredulous. And you fired? Thomas told the story and repeated it—or parts of it, since their command of Arabic was uneven. Each time, they chuckled a bit more heartily. At length, when they had completed their inquiries, they patted Thomas on the shoulders and bade him to enjoy his last night on this earth.

The young Englishman did not sleep much that night.

Bright and early the next morning, Thomas and a half dozen black eunuchs, all the sentinels of that particular group of apartments, were turned out and marched under guard to appear before their master. Young Tom had already made his peace with God and asked forgiveness for his many transgressions—for his attitude toward the brothers of the Latin school, for dodging religious services, his lapses as a son, and above all, for apostatizing (even though he had been forced to do it!). No one was more surprised than Thomas when Moulay Ismail praised his fidelity and then turned his ire on those who had allowed him entry past the penultimate door the previous night. He upbraided the hapless knaves in the crudest language, and they positively whimpered under his glare. And then, as was his custom, the tyrant wordlessly ordered their executions. Telescoping his neck, Ismail then jerked his head to one side. In an English music hall, they might have laughed, but not here. One by one, the black guards hauled each man to his knees and leaned him forward. Thomas looked away as the headman went to work with his ax. A swoosh followed by the thump of the head hitting the floor marked a clean job. A number of unpleasant sounds indicated otherwise.⁴

Thomas got his beautiful horse, and attitudes toward the reformed kafir changed overnight. From the whispers, Thomas gathered that, at least for a time, he had become famous in the Palace City.

Thomas immediately capitalized on his new influence with the sultan to find less dangerous employment, and he became the monarch's personal retainer and was kept on call. Like all courtiers and attendants, as a mark of his subservience he was obliged to shave his cranium weekly and to go about without head covering or shoes. When Moulay Ismail would ride out to inspect the palace works, Thomas often would accompany him on his own gift mount, and as he would later write, "always carrying at my girdle

a club of about three feet long, of Brazil wood, which he [Ismail] used, on any slight occasion, to knock his people on the head, which I several times had the pleasure of beholding.”

Yes, Tom Pellow was resentful toward his tormentors. The cruelty and the needless suffering and abuse of the past three years had turned the young man bitter against the Moors and Negroes who so slavishly served their emperor, and his new duties allowed Thomas to sate a bit of his desire for vengeance. He enjoyed every abasement, smiled at the groveling and head thumping, and positively sniggered the first time the butt of the sultan’s lance creased the shoulder of the little black boy carrying the parasol. The poor lad had failed to keep pace with the ruler’s horse, and for a moment the sun had fallen upon the master!⁵

But certain practices Thomas found that he could never enjoy, and certainly not the executions, which were too routine and far too efficient. The sultan always kept his executioners close at hand, and they were attuned to his signals. Seldom was a verbal order given. As he wrote in his memoire, “[Ismail] thinking that too mean, and his words of more value than the life of the best of them.” In addition to the neck routine, the sultan also had hand signals to indicate other forms of punishment. For instance, when he wanted a person to be strangled, Ismail would extend an arm and make a sudden twist of the wrist. Pain and death attended his passage through the palace every day. “So fickle, cruel, and sanguine a nature,” observed Thomas, “that none could be even for one hour secure of life.”⁶

The old tyrant was mercurial in the extreme, and actually there were times when the man was quite human. Moulay Ismail doted on his horses and his rabbits, for example. When touring the construction sites, the sultan would often dismount his horse to converse with workers on a particular idea he had, or to discuss some engineering challenge. He was even known to clamber up the scaffolding to work with the mortar crews. And he respected family, even charging Thomas, on pain of death, to visit his uncle daily. “If you don’t go every day, morning and evening, to kiss your uncle’s hand,” Ismail intoned, “by Allah, I’ll cut your head off.”⁷ Yet this was the same man who showed no concern when Captain Pellow fell ill, murdered his slaves for slacking, had captives thrown down from walls for failing to

synchronize their strokes, and beat and tortured men for what he judged to be inferior work. Thomas recalled one particularly protracted bit of brutality when Ismail found a batch of bricks to be too thin. First he summoned the master mason and upbraided him for his shoddy work, and then he had his thugs hold the poor fellow down while fifty of the inferior bricks were broken over his head. The gory mess of that scene was worse than any beheading.⁸ Such was Moulay Ismail's court, where power was arbitrary and punishment unencumbered by the crime.

For Tom Pellow, there was only one way to deliverance. Captives could dream of redemption, but not he. This became quite apparent in 1721, with the arrival in Meknes of Commodore Stewart on his mission of redemption. After years of dithering, Whitehall finally determined to make a serious effort to free its growing captive population in Morocco. This included, according to a record obtained by the English consul in Tétouan in 1719, the crews and passengers of no fewer than twenty-six English ships.⁹

As we have seen, Stewart's mission was a major success, producing the liberty of the English Christian captives at Meknes, among them Thomas's three surviving shipmates of the *Francis*, George Barnicoat, Louis Davies, and Thomas Goodman. The reason that this mission succeeded, where so many previous efforts by European negotiators had failed, is open to conjecture. In addition to crediting Stewart's demeanor, "so polite, most Christian-like, and majestic a manner," Thomas maintained that one of the sultan's favorite wives had interceded with the sultan on the commodore's behalf, but this seems highly unlikely. The most plausible explanation is that Stewart impressed and flattered Moulay Ismail; perhaps the missing hand from a past sea battle gained the old sailor some additional respect. Whatever the reason, the result was the single largest release of Christian captives during Moulay Ismail's long reign.

The entire affair was a bitter pill for Thomas. Since this emancipation did not pertain to Thomas and eighteen others who had apostatized, he could only console himself to see his surviving shipmates and the others delivered from anonymous graves.¹⁰ Still, Thomas lamented the timing, taking a jab at the failed diplomacy of Admiral George Delaval: "I heartily wish [these negotiations] had been so well performed by a certain gentleman sent to

Meknes on the same errand about four years before his; then had it in all likelihood prevented many aching hearts, and my poor uncle, with many poor Christian slaves (who during that interval died there), had probably still be alive.”¹¹ Of course, had Delaval been up to the task, Thomas, as a Christian, would have been eligible in any prisoner ransom or exchange.

Now the realization was driven home: Tom Pellow and the other English renegades no longer mattered to London. They were utterly on their own, and escape was Thomas’s only option, for remaining in this barbarous land was out of the question. There was an encumbrance, however, and a rather large one at that—Thomas Pellow had a Moorish family.

This was Moulay Ismail’s doing, of course. Anything a slave or a lackey acquired was due to the sultan’s munificence, and he enjoyed matchmaking—on a massive scale. From the early days of the Abid, he would bring groups of young black men and women together, pair them off, and pronounce them married. One day, Pellow witnessed such an event for about eight hundred men, a mix of Abid and European renegades like himself, and a like number of Negro, Berber, and mixed-race females. In an expansive mood, Ismail announced to the assembled men and boys that he had determined to provide them with wives for services rendered. It was stuff and nonsense. Ismail was preparing to send these men out as soldiers to add to his network of garrisons, so he wanted to see them profitably recreated.

It took a couple of hours for Ismail to make his pairings and dismiss the newlyweds, after which he turned and fixed his eyes upon Thomas. Then he barked a command to his chamberlain, and eight half-naked, nubile black girls were ushered into a line. “Choose one for yourself—a wife,” Ismail beckoned with a sweep of his hand.

Thomas was mortified. Marriage had never crossed his mind, not in this land, and certainly never with a Negress. But the sultan was in a good mood, and perhaps he might be persuaded to offer a more agreeable alternative. Thomas was determined to try.

I, immediately bowing twice, falling to the ground and kissing it, and after that the emperor's foot (which is the custom of those who desire to be heard, as well as a very great favor and condescension to be permitted to do), humbly entreated him, if, in case I must have a wife, that he would be graciously pleased to give me one of my own color. Then, forthwith sending them off, he ordered brought forth seven others, who all proved to be mulattoes; at which I again bowed to the ground, still entreating him to give me one of my own color; and then he ordered them also to depart, and sent for a single woman, full dressed, and who in a very little time appeared, with two young blacks attending to her, she being, no doubt, the same he [Ismail] and the queen had particularly designed for me. I being forthwith ordered to take her by the hand and lead her off.

Thomas started to obey but paused when he looked at the girl's proffered hand and then down at her feet. Perceiving that she was actually black, he hesitated. Having never before seen the henna dye that Muslim women often used to adorn their extremities, Thomas had mistaken these intricate patterns for skin color.

I was started back, like one in a very great surprise, and being asked what was the matter, I answered him [Ismail] as before; when, smiling, he ordered me to lift up her veil (it being the custom of the country women to go veiled) and look at her face; which I readily obeyed, found her to be of a very agreeable complexion, which the old rascal, crying out, in a very pleasing way, in the Spanish language, "Bono! Bono!" which signified, "Good! Good!" ordering me a second time to take her by the hand, lead her off and keep her safe.

Thomas Pellow's bride turned out to be the daughter of one of the notables of Meknes. For him, it was an excellent match. One can only wonder about the true sentiments of the father-in-law, but he dutifully welcomed the

young Englishman into his house and offered the new couple a three-day wedding celebration—"the soberest," Thomas lamented, "you ever saw."¹²

The match was barely consummated before the couple's plans were radically altered. Thomas was ordered to report to Hammo Triffoe, a mixed breed of Spaniard and Moor, who was leading a new garrison force into the countryside. Their numbers included many of Tom's fellow bridegrooms of days earlier. When he met his commander, Thomas was stunned to learn that he, a sixteen-year-old military novice, was to lead a contingent of three hundred French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian renegades on a mission to revive the abandoned fort at Tamesna.¹³

Thus began the next phase of Thomas Pellow's captivity, that of an officer in the Moroccan army. Young Tom was no soldier, but he was a quick study, and he learned fast from experienced men such as Triffoe. Moreover, his morale recovered to no small extent at being liberated from the Demented One and the shadow of the slave pens. He could breathe again. Leisure, unknown since England, was an option once more. But if he was relieved at being free of the oppressor, Thomas was uncomfortable in finding himself now the instrument of that oppression.

For the next few years Thomas lived at the garrison at Tamesna, south of present-day Rabat and about six day's march from Meknes; later he would be assigned responsibility for another two forts, including a place he called Agoory, about thirty kilometers from the capital. Much of this period was spent shooting, hunting, winemaking, and enjoying his wife and daughter, with a couple of extended interruptions to campaign. He first traveled to Marrakech and led troops in tax enforcement operations in the High Atlas Mountains, then briefly returned to Meknes with booty and prisoners. Shortly after his arrival, Thomas watched as the sultan's executioner, an "Exeter man" and former butcher, chopped off the heads of three of the ringleaders.¹⁴ For a time, Thomas thought he might lose his own belfry, as the old loon railed about his officers hoarding royal booty. As quickly as possible, he returned to the relative safety of Tamesna.

A few months later, duty again called, this time against the Berbers of Mhamid al-Ghuzlan, one of the many ksour of the Dra'a Valley of southeastern Morocco. This promised to be a more arduous campaign, for

the tribes of this region were a tenacious lot. To confront these mutinous tribesmen, Ismail had sent a good portion of his army, according to Thomas some 42,000 troops. The imperial forces, commanded by the sultan's son, Moulay Sharif, dug trenches around the city and ringed it with artillery. The defenders sortied out on several occasions to try to spike the guns, and during one of these battles, Thomas was shot in the thigh. He might have died but for the care of a German surgeon; as it was, he was out of action for four months.

The siege of Mhamid al-Ghuzlan lasted for nearly seventeen grueling months. It was hot work, to be sure, and the climate and disease took a severe toll on both sides. The battle finally turned when the besieging forces detonated an underground mine that blew down a large section of the city walls and drove the defenders back into a corner of their defenses. After another eight days of close-quarter combat, the Berbers—exhausted, driven to the brink of starvation, and with their ammunition running low—finally agreed to surrender. Their elders threw themselves upon the mercy of their enemy, but there would be no quarter. According to Thomas, the sultan's army had lost some fifteen thousand men during this campaign, and such an imposition could not go unpunished, so Moulay Sharif had the Berber survivors put to the sword. His executioners piled the severed heads in great baskets and loaded them on wagons to accompany the victorious army back to Meknes. Very soon, however, the men began to complain as the brains began to putrefy in the summer heat. A disappointed Moulay Sharif was forced to settle for ears, which were sliced off and placed in barrels of salt. However, his father did not seem to mind the diminished trophies, for he had them strung together and garlanded the palace walls with earlobes.¹⁵

Other assignments followed for Thomas, including another foray into eastern Morocco to put down a new Berber revolt. In an intense three-day battle, during which Thomas was again wounded, the rebels were crushed. This time they were let off a bit easier: forty of their leaders were sent to face the sultan to atone for their crimes. Thomas, despite recovering from another musket wound to the thigh, rode with the army back to Meknes. There, in a courtyard before the Ksar el-Mhanncha, he stood bareheaded and barefoot, his leg on fire, perspiring and praying that the headman would get it over with quickly. The fellow worked sportingly down the line of

slobbering forms. Mercifully, after seventeen strokes, Moulay Ismail raised his hand and the remainder were pardoned.¹⁶

As soon as he was able, Pellow returned to Agoory, where he had relocated, to be reunited with his family, which now included a baby boy. The months that followed were peaceful, so he began to frequent Salé, where he had a number of English merchant friends. He would stay several days at a stretch, boozing and listening to news from the home country, and occasionally scouting the harbor for ships bound for Europe. His thoughts often drifted to his parents in Penryn, who no doubt believed that they had lost their only son. What would they think of him now? Would they shun him for caving and turning Turk? Could he really abandon his young family? He certainly could not take them along to Cornwall, could he? These were the sorts of thoughts that crowded Thomas's mind as he watched the sailing ships follow the tide out to the ocean.

One answer had already presented itself. His escape would be by sea.

He had already tried once to flee, back in 1722, and the memory of that near debacle was still fresh. Having resolved to escape after Stewart's mission, and following his bloody initiative into tribal politics, he spent weeks husbanding food, studying the route, and planning for every contingency. With twelve ducats that Ismail had provided him, a rare stipend for his service, Thomas slipped away one night from Agoory and headed for Salé, determined to bribe his way aboard a vessel bound for the continent—or better yet, all the way to England.

Thomas made it to Salé with no difficulty, but then he found no ship that met his needs. After a few days of lying low, he determined on the only other option immediately available, the Portuguese enclave of Mazagan, present-day El Jadida. It was one hell of a plan B, a trek of almost 180 kilometers along a well-traveled coastal road. Although the Spanish enclave at Ceuta was far closer, it was under siege by the sultan's forces. So early one spring morning, Thomas climbed atop his mule and began the long trek south.

On the evening of the fourth day, Pellow arrived without incident at the outskirts of Mazagan, surprised at how easy it had been. His command of

Arabic and rough appearance allowed him to avoid detection, but it was not to be. As Thomas sneaked to within a hundred meters of the walls, he found himself in a Portuguese garden. Given the confines of the fort, it was common for such places to have vegetable gardens outside their walls—and plunderers as well. It was a dark, blustery night, and as Thomas made his way down a path toward a distant gate, he stumbled into four men. Thinking them to be Portuguese, Thomas identified himself as a Christian, but instead they were Moors who were raiding the garden.

Thomas was arrested, hauled off to prison in Azzemour, and nearly executed. For reasons never clear to him, a local official took sympathy on the young man and arranged for his release. Thomas returned to his garrison after an absence of nearly four months, yet not a word was said about his unexcused leave.¹⁷ This lax accountability, and the ease with which he had moved about the country before his blunder, were not lost upon Thomas, who determined to try again. “Notwithstanding my so late miraculous escape from the bloody knife ay Azzemour,” he wrote, “I was then thoroughly resolved to pursue it.”¹⁸

Pellow tried to resume his life as before, but his mind was elsewhere. He had never been reconciled to this land, but henceforth he could no longer find the periods of tranquility that had marked his early years in Tamesna. Moreover, the pretense of playing the Muslim lackey grew ever more tiresome. Thomas’s visits to Salé became more frequent, and his resolve to find an escape was furthered by personal tragedy. First, in 1725, his ten-month-old son died. Then, four years later, while Thomas was recuperating from his latest wounds—to the shoulder, hand, and yet again the thigh—received at the siege of Fez during the brief civil war between Moulay Ahmad and Abdelmalek, he learned that his wife and daughter had passed away. Though Thomas failed to record the cause for the latter deaths, their passing being three days apart suggests disease.¹⁹

Thomas was wracked by grief and, no doubt, guilt for not being there to comfort wife and daughter, his “little prattler,” in their last days.²⁰ But he was also realistic, and he had never intended to die in Morocco. His Moorish family had been thrust upon him, and he had come to understand that he could not take his wife and children back to England. Their deaths

helped to clarify the future, though probably not as dispassionately as Pellow would later write:

Their death gave me very little uneasiness, yet could not I help being under concern for them, and especially the child, who always used, at my coming home, to clasp her little arms around my neck, hugging and bemoaning her poor father, and telling me that I should no longer go into wars, and that she and her mother would go to me with England, to live with her grandmother.

These reflections, I say, gave me some concern; however, I soon endeavored to forget them, for, in short, what could I do? To bring them back was I knew impossible ... and my intentions were fully bent upon escape, I was really glad they were dead; and I plainly told myself that I could find in my heart in their lifetime to endeavor to leave the country, I had now no more room left for excuse, but ought to pursue it; and therefore I was resolved to lay hold of all opportunities.²¹

By 1729, at the age of twenty-five, Thomas Pellow had spent more than half of his years in Morocco. He might have imagined, with the old despot moldering in his grave and his personal burden lifted, a wider path to freedom. However, he would have been crestfallen to know the truth.

17

DENOUEMENT

Allah earnestly desires to cleanse thee of stains—O thou art of the house of the Prophet—and to purify thee.

—from the seal of Moulay Ismail¹

According to most reports, the last decade of Moulay Ismail's rule was relatively uneventful. Writing several decades later, Moroccan historian al-Zayyānī described this period as follows:

From this time one, the sultan devoted himself exclusively to the construction of his palaces and gardens. Besides, the country enjoyed complete security. A Jew or a woman could travel from Oudjda [Oujda] to Oued Noun without anyone daring to ask from where they came or where they were headed. Abundance reigned everywhere: cereals, foods, herds, were to be had at low prices. In all Morocco, one found neither thief nor bandit.²

Mundane though it might have been, this was not a particularly happy time. To begin with, taxes had never been higher. As al-Nāṣirī wrote, “The people of Morocco became like the Fellahs [peasant laborers] of Egypt: they worked and paid taxes every week, every month, and every year.”³ Resentment of the sultan's tax policies was general, one of the few unifying

sentiments of city and country folk. People hoarded from the preceptor, peasants their grain and merchants their profits, and peace was maintained at the point of a gun. In the mountains, the Berbers scavenged weapons and horses and bided their time, and the standoff with the ulama of Fez festered.

There were the occasional annoyances, such as infighting among princes. In Taroudant, when the sultan's son and governor, Abdelmalek, decided to stop sending his share of taxes to his father, Moulay Ismail just looked the other way. In 1711, the Tuwāt rose in revolt and chased the sultan's governor into the desert. Mohammad Saffar was restored to power only at the head of a Moroccan army sent from the Gharb. The four hundred heads displayed from the ksar of Timintīt kept the Berbers cowed for a time, but they remained a restive lot.⁴

Another irritation arose at Ceuta in 1721. Months earlier, King Philip V had sent a flotilla and a force of sixteen thousand, under the command of the Marquis of Lède, to the enclave to encourage the Moroccan sultan to end the pointless affair. One morning the Spanish sortied from the Royal Walls and caught the besiegers by surprise. The Spanish troops overran the trenches and stormed the main strongpoint, the Afrag citadel. The Moroccans lost hundreds of men, and the survivors fled to Tétouan. The victors carried off all the stocks of food and munitions, twenty-seven guns, and four battle flags. After destroying the Moroccan works, the Spanish returned to their enclave, and the Moroccans filtered back to their ruined lines before Ceuta. Even then, Moulay Ismail refused to concede defeat. Only with his death did the business finally come to an end, after thirty-three fruitless years.⁵

There was some positive news that year with Commodore Stewart's arrival and the ratification of the Anglo-Moroccan treaty of peace and commerce. This was the first of its kind, according to which the Moroccan government committed to protecting foreigners (the English) and their economic interests in the kingdom. Significantly, this relationship provided Moroccan wheat, livestock, and other foodstuff for the English garrison at Gibraltar, and opened a window to the outer world that had previously been closed.⁶

Other than with England, Moroccan foreign policy was moribund, and the kingdom gradually settled into isolation. Relations with France went nowhere after Ben Aïsha's embassy to Paris. Ismail's expectations had been unrealistic: he wanted the French to treat him as an equal, and he wanted their help against the Spanish. But the haughty French were loath to acknowledge the merits of any other country or culture, let alone a barbarian race. Cooperating with France against Spain became impossible in 1700, when Louis's grandson took the Spanish throne as Philip V. In any case, there were new players on the scene in Paris, and none of them cared about Africa. In 1715, old Louis XIV finally gave up the ghost, and his grandson, aged five, succeeded to the throne, though the government would be directed by a regent, Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, until 1723. Relations between Morocco and France went into a freeze, finally ending with a rupture in 1718.⁷

Moulay Ismail's relations with his African neighbors also dead-ended. In Timbuktu, the pashas had long since given up hope of material assistance from the mother country. The Arma still celebrated their Moroccan ties, notably with a grand festival on February 28, 1691, to mark the centennial of Judar's arrival at the Niger, and they continued to honor Moulay Ismail's name during the Friday sermons. The Arma realized, however, that they were on their own. Few in number and no longer able to overawe their neighbors, the Arma's survival depended upon defensible terrain, their prowess in firearms, and the odd respect that they held among the Tuareg and the Songhay as their primary interlocutor on the Niger Bend. It was a tenuous existence characterized by spasmodic violence and uneasy truces. Ten years after Moulay Ismail's death, the Pashalik suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Tuareg at the Battle of Toya. Somehow they managed to hang on for another century, until one final military debacle in 1833 spelled their downfall.⁸

In the east, after the disastrous campaign in Algeria in 1701, the border between Morocco and the Regency of Algiers remained largely stable. Moulay Ismail was reconciled to the Moulouya frontier, and the Turks were content with finally capturing Oran and Mers El Kebir from the Spanish in 1708. Elsewhere Ottoman fortunes continued to decline with another defeat by the Austrians in 1718, leading to the loss of more territory in the

Balkans, including the prized city of Belgrade.⁹ The sultans in Constantinople had far weightier concerns than their frontier with Morocco.

Perhaps feeling his mortality, Moulay Ismail decided upon the holy task of renovating and enlarging the tombs of Morocco's first Islamic rulers, Idriss I and II, two of the most important sites of veneration in the land. In 1719 he sent an army of workmen to Moulay Idriss and Fez, and the work was completed by 1722. For once, the ulama of Fez approved of the sultan's actions.¹⁰

As time passed, the question of succession became a pressing concern within the makhzen. Moroccan historians disagree about whether Moulay Ismail formally established the succession before his death. Despite his controversial lifestyle, Moulay Ahmad, fifty years old, was the presumptive heir. Al-Zayyâni wrote that, as the sultan neared his end, he sent for the Moulay Ahmad, the "crown prince," from Tadla.¹¹ Undecided, Al-Nâṣirî cited two conflicting sources, one of whom supported al-Zayyâni's version, another who denied that the sultan made any such choice. According to this latter account, as the end neared, the sultan sent for his grand vezir, Abou Abbas Elyahm  di. "I am on my last day on earth," the dying man rasped, "and I want you to tell me upon which of my sons I should confer power, because you know their character better than I." Elyahm  di, taken aback by such a question from a man who famously kept his own counsel, managed to reply, "O Master, you have given me a grave responsibility, but, to tell you the truth, you do not have a single son upon whom to confer the affairs of the Muslims." At this, the sultan let the matter drop. "Allah," Al-Nâṣirî concluded, "knows which is the truth."¹²

Moulay Ismail had fallen ill in December 1726 with what Braithwaite described as a "Mortification" of the lower abdomen. Despite the best efforts of the sultan's physicians, infection set in and advanced steadily. Ismail's appetite faded, and severe cramps and bouts of incontinence followed. Within a few weeks he was unable to mount a horse, and shortly thereafter he was bedridden. Braithwaite described the scene: "His Distemper toward his latter End became so nauseous, that no one could bear to be in the same room where he lay, notwithstanding all the Art of Perfume, etc. He was ever consulting Physicians before his Death, for the

Moors never believe any Distemper to be incurable, and have more faith in [medicine] than other People in the World; and no one dared to undeceive him.”

On March 22, 1727, three days after Moulay Ahmad’s arrival in Meknes, Sultan Moulay Ismail breathed his last. Revulsion provided a solitary death. According to Braithwaite, “He was found dead without any one being in his Room when he expir’d.”¹³ He was eighty-one years old.¹⁴

Moulay Ismail had been sultan for fifty-five years, so long that most Moroccans had known him as their only leader. Up to that time, the duration of Ismail’s reign was surpassed in the Islamic world only by the Fatimid caliph Abū Tamīm Ma’ad al-Muṣṭanṣir bi-llāh, who ruled for fifty-eight years. To this day, Moulay Ismail is the longest-serving monarch in Moroccan history.

During his reign, Europe and the Mediterranean world had seen tremendous changes. Moulay Ismail’s reign bracketed some of the great events of the time, including the Franco-Dutch War (1672–1678), the Great Turkish War (1683–1699), the Glorious Revolution (1688), the Nine Years’ War (1688–1697), and the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714). The map of Europe had been altered. French borders were expanded, though the seeds of the Ancien Régime’s collapse were sown; Austria emerged as a great power; and the empires of Spain and the Ottomans had passed into decline. Many of Ismail’s contemporaries had come and gone. The Ottomans had seen five sultans, England had seen six monarchs, and there had been three Holy Roman emperors. Only France, with two kings during this span, experienced the same degree of political stability as the Moroccan sultanate.

Many were happy to see Moulay Ismail gone. In Fez, the people killed his governor. As news spread, more of the late sultan’s caïds were assassinated.¹⁵ In Meknes, work on the Palace City ceased immediately. According to Thomas Pellow, the people of Meknes who had been dragooned into royal service shut themselves up in their homes. When word of the old tormenter’s passing reached Volubilis, the workers transporting stones from the ruins dropped their loads in place, where they remained as a sad landmark for future generations. Around 1899, the historian Budgett

Meakin visited the area and recorded, “I have traced across the plain from Mezquinez to Ksar Farâôn or Volubilis the irregular series of huge brown stones which his slaves were so laboriously bringing from the Roman ruins when the joyous news passed along their line.” Meakin, with the benefit of hindsight, could appreciate how the tale of these old stones served as an allegory for the old bully’s imperium. And far off to the east, when the report eventually reached the Tuwât, the Berber tribes there once more rose in revolt.

And yet, for all those who celebrated the tyrant’s exit, Ismail had his admirers. It would not be long before nostalgia for his firm hand washed over the land. The noted Moroccan historian Mohammad al-Oufrani, writing about the time of Moulay Ismail’s death, lamented,

O Moulay Ismail, O Sun of the Earth!

O thou for whom all created beings would not suffice as a ransom!

Thou art none other than the sword of victory which Allah has drawn from his sheath, to set thee alone among the khalifas.

As for him who knows not to obey thee, it is that Allah has blinded him,

and that his steps have wandered far from where they ought to be.¹⁶

EPILOGUE

Moulay Ismail was, if nothing else, a controversial figure. Three centuries after his death, the man and his legacy remain provocative subjects.

As previously noted, Western and Moroccan views of this sultan vary widely. The Western view was shaped by twelve publications that appeared between 1683 and 1740, beginning with Germain Moüette's *Relation de la captivité du Sr. Moüette dans les royaumes de Fez et de Maroc*, and extending to Thomas Pellow's *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow, of Penryn, Mariner: Three and Twenty Years of Captivity Among the Moors*.¹ Although none of these works were widely printed, they became the primary source material of later European historians, providing an enduring image of Moulay Ismail as one of history's greatest villains.

These early accounts leave us with three ideas: that Moulay Ismail's regime was the soul of despotic government, that such a rule was enabled by the culture of this bizarre land, and that the man himself was a monster. The first two of these ideas were well articulated by the unknown English captive of *An Account of South-West Barbary*. About Ismail's government, he wrote:

Their Government is Despotic and Absolute. Their King's Will is the Law; and his Pleasure is the sole Warrant for the Actions of his Subjects. The Chief Sort are but his Creatures and Tools: And the Commonality are his Servants and Slaves. He raises and prefers whom he thinks fit and disposes of the Lives and Fortunes of his People pro Arbitrio without suffering them to contradict or dispute whatever he says. And though they pretend to acknowledge the Mahomaten Law as the Fundamental and Indispensable Rule of their Religion and Worship, yet the King's comment upon this must be received as the Best and most Valid Interpretation. And none of the Clergy dare, upon Pain of highest Punishment, presume to say, That his

Majesty's order is a Transgression; but are forced, contrary to their Judgement and Consciences, to vindicate and applaud his Barbarous Cruelties and Murders, as so many Instances of the greatest Justice and Equity.

This viewpoint was colored with prejudices, according to which natural disposition rendered Eastern people more susceptible to the sort of tyranny that would be unimaginable in the West. In this sense, the Moors spawned their own demon. Our anonymous Englishman continued:

I have often reflected upon their Tyrant's Oppression and Cruel Usage to his miserable subjects with Amazement and Horror: And have, at the same time, equally wondered at their Tameness, Cowardice, and Pusillanimity; That such a multitude should ever contentedly suffer one Man to Tyrannize over them, without some Means of Redress. But when I conversed with them some time, I was induced, by consideration of their Natural Falsity and Jealousy, and their mutual Distrust and Suspicion of one another, to impute it in a great measure to this Cause, viz. That being conscious to themselves of each other's Treachery and Falsehood, they could never confide in one another to form a Conspiracy or Rebellion with any possible Hope of Secrecy and Success: For there is no-body [who dares] communicate any thing, even to his Brother, that he is afraid should be made publick [sic].²

As for Moulay Ismail, these accounts place him in a rogues' gallery of crazed despots, next to the likes of Russia's Ivan IV, "the Terrible." The tales of Ismail's senseless cruelties are legion. Some, like the earlier tale of the execution of a cat, are patently absurd, and many more seem nearly as improbable. Father Busnot left us another such account about the ruler's treatment of his women.

He [Moulay Ismail] had strangled one [a concubine], a while ago, for having picked on orange while walking through an orchard where there were so many, which are neglected and taken by the slaves. It is said that he had the breasts of some amputated, in having them place their chests on the edge of a box which, on his order, 2 eunuchs slammed the cover. He exercised in the harem other unspoken cruelties that decorum does not permit me to report.³

Another anecdote from *An Account of South-West Barbary* is typical among Christian accounts of the man.

It happened one Day, as he was sitting by his Workmen, that a poor Negroe, one of his slaves, came and fell down before him, His Majesty asking what he wanted? The poor Wretch answered, Bread; and said that he had wrought for two Days together, without Eating a Mouthful, and was not able to hold up any longer. Whereupon, the King replied, That he would take care for the future, that he should have no occasion for Bread, and immediately commanded all his Teeth to be pulled out.⁴

I avoided mention of most of these incidents in the preceding pages, since they were not specifically characterized as firsthand observations. Historical writing at the time did not stress the importance of attribution; therefore we have no way of differentiating between eyewitness observation, lies, and everything in between. Additionally, we must consider the writer's access to the reported information. Most of these writers spent little time in the sultan's presence and among the members of the court, so in all likelihood the information they received about the kingdom and its ruler was at best secondhand. Only two sources, Joseph de Léon and Thomas Pellow, having spent years in the sultan's service, had the kind of placement and access to allow the reader to take their observations at face value. Even so, these accounts are not without problems.

According to French orientalist Chantal La Veronne, Spanish archives have no record of the author de Léon, which should not be so, since de Léon was serving as a soldier and Arabic translator at the fort of Peñón de Vélez at the time of his capture.⁵ It is only the detail of de Léon's observations, much of its corroborated by other sources, that establishes its authenticity. Pellow's account is compromised by the presence of several passages lifted from Windus's Journey to Mequinez, which the editor of the modern edition assessed to have been added by the original editor to "pad out" the book.⁶ Finally, there is the question of the motive of the writer. Many of these accounts were clearly intended for financial gain, and others were meant to bring attention to the plight of the Christian captives. From both of these perspectives, the more sensational the content, the better.

And then there are those troubling numbers: Saint-Olon's figure of twenty thousand killed by Moulay Ismail's own hand in twenty years. Six years later, according to Jean-Baptiste Estelle, that number had ballooned further still: "To say that the king of Morocco in 26 years of rule has killed 36,000 men with his own hand, seems fantastic; however, it is certain, and one reason leaves no doubt, is that a poor Spaniard slave who had been with the prince before he became king, who had been dead now this past year and a half, had noted the murders committed by this prince himself since he became king; he noted in his memoire 36,000; after which one need say no more about his cruelty."⁷

Absent historical documents to support these claims, we can only speculate about their veracity. We do have, however, Henry Koehler's important study, *Les Exécutions Sanglantes de Moulay Ismael et les Captifs Chrétiens*, which sheds some light on this question. Relying on a register kept by the Franciscan monks of Meknes, which recorded all baptisms, deaths, and cause of death of the Christian prisoners at the Moroccan capital, Koehler estimated the number of captives killed personally by Ismail or on his orders at approximately 130 to 140. (The register recorded 127 executions during a thirty-nine year period from December 1684; for the timeframe not covered by the register (1672-1684), Koehler estimated another ten executions.) This equates to an average annual execution rate of about three captives. Some years when the sultan was away on campaign, there were no recorded killings. The highest was in 1698, when Ismail

executed a total of twenty-two captives. The manner of execution varied, usually by lance or beheading and occasionally by firearm. On one occasion, two Spaniards were eaten by his lions. The sultan's motive, when such was recorded, was usually failure to persuade a captive to renounce Christianity for Islam, though sometimes it was for poor performance on the job.⁸

These figures, of course, are but a partial accounting. They do not take into consideration Moulay Ismail's treatment of his countrymen, including the Abid. We can only guess at the number of victims in this category, but it takes a leap of imagination to believe that Moulay Ismail murdered about two people a day, as Estelle's figure implies.

As for Moulay Ismail's prodigious sex life, the numbers are equally imprecise. Of the various numbers advanced for his wives and concubines by Christian writers—the topic does not appear to have interested Muslim chroniclers—Busnot's figures of four and five hundred respectively are probably as good as any.⁹ Unfortunately the priest failed to specify whether these numbers reflected only those women active in the sultan's service or included those retired to Tafilet. In terms of the progeny, of the many numbers put forward, al-Zayyānī's are almost certainly the most reliable, given his access to official records as well as to the late sultan's surviving family at Tafilet. Sometime during the reign of Mohammad ben Abdallah (1757–1790), al-Zayyānī, as an official in the government, was responsible for distributing pensions to Moulay Ismail's offspring; in this capacity, he had access to a ledger listing his children. His trips to Tafilet allowed him to know several of the late sultan's sons and daughters, who were still numerous enough to occupy 105 houses in the oasis town. According to al-Zayyānī, Ismail had 528 sons and an equal number of daughters at the time of his death.¹⁰ This remarkable number does not include those who had died. Given the high infant and child mortality rates at the time, as well as a low life expectancy, this probably pushed the number of live births among Ismail's women to seven hundred or more for both sexes.¹¹

Ultimately, numbers are but a detail. The question, for those inclined to accept the Western interpretation of the man, concerns the extent of Moulay Ismail's mental illness. Sociopath or psychopath? Such are the options. Age

may also offer an explanation. Some accounts indicate that Ismail grew more violent in his final years. Others, such as Windus's chronicle, described his forgetfulness after meting out punishment, which lead us to believe the aging despot may have suffered from dementia in his later years. This is plausible, but ultimately speculative.

Perhaps the most generous Western interpretation of Moulay Ismail came from the French historian Henri Terrasse, who summed upon his work as follows: "Moulay Ismail lacked, along with the understanding of the outside world, a clear intelligence of the internal problems of the country as well as a paternal and active compassion for the hardships of his people. His intelligence and especially his heart were not at equal to his activity and his energy: he forgot that one can found nothing stable on hate and cruelty. Despite the magnitude of his work, too often brutal and ostentatious, Moulay Ismail cannot be counted among the benefactors of Morocco."¹²

Unfortunately, Moroccan historians are not much help in corroborating or debunking these Western views. Earlier generations of Moroccan historians, men such as al-Zayyânî and al-Nâṣirî, certainly provided a wealth of information about this sultan and his times; however, the kingdom's modern historians offer a distinctly limited perspective. As addressed in the preface of this book, their attitude toward Moulay Ismail is colored by national pride and political sensibilities. Moroccan historians are either unwilling or unable to acknowledge the worst excesses of his regime.

Mohammad El Fasi wrote the following in a special edition of the *Hespéris Tamuda*, the reputable journal of Moroccan studies, published in 1962 to commemorate the tricentennial of Moulay Ismail's ascension to the throne:

Christian historians have described him as cruel, violent, a despot, given to unprovoked anger without any pretext but for the pleasure of seeing blood flow. All these allegations are false. That which pushed them to shape this image was faith in the account of European captives, who were naturally treated in the manner of the age, which was violence, in the name of reprisals. But this violence did not surpass in degree that of Muslims in captivity among the Christian nations. Each of these [Christian] prisoners,

liberated and returned to his country, set to describing, with exaggeration, the trials they endured, so well that the idea of the violence and cruelty of Moulay Ismail gained currency in the minds of Europeans.¹³

Such blanket dismissals are typical of the Moroccan viewpoint. As previously noted, there is an element of truth to such arguments; however, these analytical blinkers prevent us from discerning fact from fiction, or at the very least gaining a balanced perspective. Given such an attitude, no reconciliation is possible between Western and Moroccan views of the man.

In the end, we must draw our own conclusions, pulling upon common threads in Western accounts and mindful of prejudices, the limitation of attribution, access, and motives. Accordingly, Moulay Ismail appears to us as a man of limited intellect. For a ruler of a Mediterranean kingdom, with windows onto Europe and the Ottoman Empire, his worldview was incredibly underdeveloped. Such was on full display with the comical proselytizing to Louis XIV and James II and the reckless misadventures in Algeria. In governance, Ismail was appallingly myopic. His character demonstrated excessive egotism and a penchant for violence.

Moulay Ismail was not unique among the butchers of his age in slaughtering his political enemies and putting cities to the sword, but one must look far and wide to find a ruler who invented his own form of corporal punishment (tossing), who murdered the defenseless with his own hands, and who enslaved hundreds of thousands of his own people. And as Terrasse has pointed out, as Commander of the Faithful, the man showed absolutely no paternalism for his flock. However, while we condemn his dark side, we must also extol Moulay Ismail's exemplary qualities: his enormous drive, passion, vitality, and physical courage. Although this sultan's reputation in the West is colored with the many negatives, among his people the attributes are what are remembered.

His legacy is less a matter of controversy. It is generally accepted that Moulay Ismail's greatest contribution to modern Morocco was the consolidation of the Alaouite Dynasty. In completing the work of his brother Moulay Rachid, he also struck a decisive blow against the zawaia,

the local powers that had bedeviled the country for centuries. In so doing, Moulay Ismail stymied the maraboutic movement, which never regained its former power, and thus the Berbers were deprived of the unifying force that the Sufi brotherhoods provided. The days of such grassroots political challenges to central authority, as represented by such movements as the Dilâ, were over. Moulay Ismail's other signal achievement was the return to Moroccan control of the cities of Mamora, Larache, and Tangiers.¹⁴

Otherwise, Moulay Ismail's long reign yielded nothing positive. This ruler left Morocco isolated on the international scene, notwithstanding the treaty with England. From an internal perspective, his regime merely papered over the underlying contradictions of the Moroccan state—the Arab Problem, the divide between north and south, and between the city and the country. His economic policies, if such a term applies, were ruinous. The army he created became a nightmare for the kingdom. And as a father and political leader, he failed abjectly to educate his sons and prepare for the succession. The poor-to-pathetic quality of the sons who succeeded him is proof enough of this.

Moulay Ismail's Morocco was the most fragile of states, despite appearances. In this Age of Absolutism, never was a rule more personal, and perhaps never did a regime crash so completely. Ismail's son Moulay Ahmad was able to garner enough support from the power brokers in and around Meknes—the Abid, the Udaya tribal leaders, and the makhzen—to succeed his father, but his grip on power was feeble from the start. He ruled under the “tutorship of the Abid,” more interested in the pleasures of the palace than in governing. His largesse in doling out his father's possessions to his backers could buy him only so much time. The country slipped into chaos, the Udaya attacked Fez, Berber tribes began to rise up across the interior, and the Abid were powerless or unwilling to intervene.¹⁵

After a year of mounting disorder, the Abid decided to replace Ahmad with one of his brothers—and so began the carousel of kings atop the Sharifan Kingdom. Given the nature of the Ismailian state, perhaps such was unavoidable. As Ernest Mercier observed, “The weakness of his successors, yielded the inevitable reaction to a regime so long and oppressive, revealing once more the drawback of autocracy, whose power depends upon he who

exercises power, the eternal problem of the government of men: democratic regimes often lead to the weakness of nations, whereas autocratic regimes that might be strong, when in the hand of a man of genius, [but] collides with the difficulty of the transfer of power.”¹⁶

Although Moroccan historians gloss over or ignore the most unpleasant aspects of Ismail’s reign, they can be quite candid about the implications of his autocratic style, particularly the unintended consequences of the Abid. As one Moroccan historian noted, “Moulay Ismail, as we have seen, had organized his armed forces in mobilizing the abid al boukhari; he had also endorsed, in a certain way, the separation of the State and society. The sultan thought that such an army, tied to his person, would promote the continuity of central power. In reality, after his death, the army of the abid al boukhari became not a guarantor of security and stability as he had wished but a powerful factor of political destabilization.”¹⁷

Three decades of chaos engulfed Morocco after Ismail’s death. During this time, widely acknowledged as some of the worst years in Moroccan history, everything broke down. At the national level, various factions, including the religious notables, the Udaya jayish, the resurgent Sanhaja Berbers of the Middle Atlas, and above all, the Abid vied with one another for political control. By this time, Ismail’s elite guard had morphed into a privileged caste, the Boukhara, the black tribe of the makhzen. Many held titles in government; they acquired property, and some grew wealthy. Al-Nāṣirī wrote, “Under the reign of this prince, their power and riches, the grandeur of their houses and their palaces, the number of their pure bred horses, the choice of their arms, the extent of their fortune and the beauty of their dress, having attained such a degree that no one has reached before them.”¹⁸

The Boukhara and other power brokers jockeyed from one of Ismail’s sons to another in a dizzying display of dynastic dysfunction. In those three decades, seven of Ismail’s sons succeeded to the throne—one of them, Moulay Abdallah, at least four times.¹⁹ Their armies and militias ravaged the land, and all major urban areas were targeted by mutinous Abid and other armed groups. Everywhere lawlessness and brigandage returned with a vengeance.

Thomas Pellow witnessed the chaos. He served in Moulay Abdallah's army and participated in a seven-month siege of Fez. He witnessed numerous atrocities, and bandits robbed him on the road. In 1738 he finally secured passage on a ship bound for Gibraltar, and from there he proceeded to London. After dreaming so long of being back in England, he was slapped with the disquieting sensation of being at sea in his own land. London was alien to him. When at last he reached Penryn on October 15, 1738, he recognized not a soul, not even his aged parents. They also could not discern the vestige of the twelve-year-old under the bushy beard. Two years after Thomas's tearful reunion, he would publish his chronicle, *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow, of Penryn, Mariner: Three and Twenty Years of Captivity Among the Moors*. In closing his account, Thomas's words reflected a surreal quality. "To look back upon and seriously consider all the years of my captivity," he reflected, "is so frightful and amazing, that all must allow that nothing but the Almighty protection of a great, good, all-seeing, and most-sufficient, and gracious God could have carried me through it or delivered me out of it."²⁰

Thomas escaped none too soon. The year he departed, the latest sultan, Moulay Mohammad ben Arbiya, was deposed in favor of another of Ismail's sons, Moulay al-Mostadi. This represented the eighth change of government in the eleven years since Moulay Ismail's death. After each iteration, scores were settled as notables of the previous regime were arrested and their property was confiscated. Many were executed, and no one was safe. Even Moulay Abdallah's mother was held for ransom. Fez and Meknes, among other cities, were sacked by looting militias, and in the country, Arab and Berber armies roamed and raided. On top of this, famine struck, and according to al-Zayyâni, in the Fez area alone some eighty thousand people died.²¹

The Abid contributed much to the anarchy. They were the Praetorian Guard equivalent, the kingmakers. The Abid helped elect Ismail's successors and then bedeviled each in turn, wringing gratuity payments from them and rioting and looting when their demands were not satisfied. Thusly, Moulay Ismail's carefully amassed coffers were liquidated within a year of his death, and with the Abid in control of all the senior financial posts, the treasury remained in a state of crisis.²² For Moulay Ismail's sons and

successors, it was a hopeless situation, since their ability to pay was the determinant factor behind the Abid's support. Tentative potentates, they chafed at their predicament and schemed with potential Arab and Berber allies, but none of them dared to openly confront their father's creation.²³

Despite its political clout during this “dictatorship of the abid,” the Boukhara was slowly unraveling.²⁴ Given the hostility of the population and the ineptitude of Moulay Ismail’s successors, the institution could not be sustained. The Abid’s strength, indeed its survival, depended upon a strong central government, one able to promote their interests and ensure their upkeep. Absent that, they had to fend for themselves. After Ismail’s death, they had to do just that, and they were drawn into dynastic infighting and court intrigues. They ceased to be a monolithic body and fractured into factions that supported rival political camps. From that point on, the Boukhara saw their collective influence start to fade.

The abandonment of the network of rural forts was one of the earliest and most evident signs of the Abid’s decay. Without the backing of the government and soon after support of the local communities, within a short time after Moulay Ismail’s death, the Abid were obliged to quit their rural redoubts. Most migrated to Meknes, which became the main Abid garrison after Machra ar-Remla was abandoned. The Abid’s military prowess was drained away in steady conflict with the Berbers. In 1735, they suffered a grievous defeat at the hands of the Berber Zayane tribe in the Middle Atlas. Then came the great earthquake of 1755, which devastated their encampments, killing scores.²⁵ When the government moved out of Meknes, the sultan was no longer under their thumb. Through the years, rulers worked readily to isolate and weaken the Boukhara by drawing more and more Arabs and Berbers into the makhzen and the army. As the eighteenth century wore on, the Boukhara drifted to irrelevance and their communities began to disperse, returning for the most part to southern villages and oases.

Moulay Ismail’s other great project, the new capital of Meknes, also did not long survive him. With its benefactor’s passing, the city went into rapid decline. In 1728 Meknes was subject to a siege, and it suffered several rounds of looting by the Abid. The Riad al-Anbari went up in flames, a

reprisal by Moulay Abdallah for the makhzen's support of his rival, Moulay Ahmad.²⁶ The Palace City quickly emptied of captives, horses, and treasures, and the harem dispersed. According to Joseph de Léon, Moulay Ahmad dispensed many of the childless women to his patronage network of shaykhs and caïds, while those with children were allowed to leave for Tafilet.²⁷

The capital eventually reverted to Fez, which had not been so honored since the end of the Wattasid Dynasty in 1549. It would remain there until 1912, when the French Protectorate moved the seat of government to Rabat, where it remains today. Meknes slipped into obscurity and its population dwindled. The earthquake of 1755 accelerated the ruin of Ismail's vision, as walls crumbled and ceilings collapsed. The French traveler and writer Pierre Loti visited Meknes in 1889 and wrote this about the former capital:

Meknes suddenly reappears, very close to us now and immense, crowning with its gray shadow succession of hills behind which the sun is setting. We are separated from the town only by a ravine of verdure, a medley of poplars, mulberry-trees, orange-trees, any tree of will, all in their fresh tints of April. Very high against the yellow sky show the lines of superimposed ramparts, the innumerable terraces, the minarets, the towers of the mosques, the formidable embattled kasbahs, and, above a number of fortress walls, the green tiled roof of the Sultan's palace. It is even more imposing than Fez, and more solemn. But it is only a phantom of a town, a mass of ruins and rubbish, inhabited scarce by more than five or six thousand souls, Arabs, Berbers and Jews.²⁸

Over the years, one of the few buildings of Meknes to escape the ravages of time was Moulay Ismail's mausoleum. The tomb, relocated just across from the Pavilion of the Ambassadors, was originally the resting place of Shaykh Elmejoûb, a sixteenth-century poet and mystic.²⁹ Moulay Ahmad expanded this site into the imperial mausoleum, in the classical palatial style of Granada. To pay homage to the departed, one must cross a great courtyard, supported by several marble pillars joined by arches and crowned in

elaborate yeseria carved plasterwork. Zellige tile work dazzles throughout, a green hexagram predominating on the floor and blue on the walls high above, just beneath the ceiling. Passing the fountain in the center of the courtyard, one arrives at the niche where Ismail's sarcophagus lies, along with those of one of his wives and two sons, surrounded by a low partition and illuminated by a brass chandelier hanging from the ceiling by a thirty-foot chain. Conspicuous against the walls surrounding the tomb are the four floor clocks—gifts from Louis XIV that Abdallah Ben Aïsha had brought back from France in 1699. Somehow, they survived.

As did the Alaouites. We may wonder how it was that they did not follow the same path to perdition as the Saadians. The explanation may be as simple as the absence of another family of chorfa to rise up and challenge the Alaouites. Such allowed the cycle of violence to spend itself, and after the death of Moulay Abdallah in 1757, the kingdom stabilized. The regimes that followed muddled along in isolation and poverty, but they survived in large part because they accepted the limit of their power. There would be no drive to centralization, no further effort to master the countryside. The kingdom settled into coexistence between the bled makhzen and the bled siba, the lands under the sultan's control and the lands of disorder. In a sense, it was a détente made possible by running the country into the ground. Here we find another aspect of Moulay Ismail's equivocal legacy and a reason why his ancestors are still in power today.

APPENDIX

LETTER FROM MOULAY ISMAIL TO JAMES II¹

Praise to Allah alone!

There is no power but that of the Lord most-high and mighty; there is none more loved than he.

On the part of a servant of Allah, who confides in Allah, who in all his affairs resigns himself to Allah, having with him and none other than him, the prince of true believers, he who fights for the religion of Allah, Lord of this world and the next.

May Allah assist in his victories, accord him protection, and facilitate his success; may he perpetuate, in right action, noble virtues and an excellent reputation.² So be it by the Lord of this world and the next.

To the king of the English who resides in the country of the French, Jacques II, called James in his country. Salvation is for he who follows the right path, and he who separates himself from the path of error and evil; he who believes in Allah and his prophet and are so guided.

We write you these lines for two reasons, one of them religious, and the other political. That which we bring to this is the desire to alert you, to warn you, and to guide you, all in consideration of that which the late King of England, your brother, who made us aware of his true feelings on the subject of his belief in Allah and his religion, and, as he was divinely inspired and persuaded that our religion was the most exceptional of all; because of this, he asked of us peace for Tangiers and sent to our noble court one of his officers, and this more than one or two times, for the purpose of honoring our Sharifan nobility. According to our laws, correspondence is indeed permitted between kings, regardless of their diversity of languages and differences of religion.

We approved that which he [Charles II] did and were satisfied with what he desired of us, and thus we sent one of our officers as an ambassador [Mohammad Ben Haddou] to his court; he presented himself, as you have seen, and you were witness to the excellent reception accorded to him, so much so that the ambassador returned joyous and content, for which we had much satisfaction. We always kept this in consideration in honoring what we had agreed at Tangiers. When the city was being abandoned [by the English], we were watchful as munitions, cannon, and the inhabitants were being evacuated. The Moors nearby informed of what was happening. However, we did not want to react or to interfere in any way. We behaved thusly in appreciation of the uprightness he [Charles II] showed to our ambassador and, as he kept his word, we granted his request. Certainly, we wished that he lived to see the work of Allah by our hands in conquering Larache from the Spanish, and in the siege of Ceuta that we conduct today. He would see the extraordinary expenses that the Spanish are obliged to incur and the innumerable piasters spent for their provisions. By all this, he knew of our commitment and how we turned a blind eye to what happened at Tangiers. He saw that our word and the treaties we kept with him never wavered; [and so] for that the upright conduct of your brother, his demonstrated good faith, and persuaded that this to be the truth of Allah, [these] are the reasons that bring us at present to write you.³

This missive is about two matters, one of religion, and the other of politics. With regard to religion, you will find useful in this world and the next much by the good advice we offer as the light of the true direction. You must know that Allah, whose name is glorified and whose attributes are sanctified, created all creatures only to serve and to recognize him as the only Allah, without companion. The divine word of the Lord is law, as he said, "I created genius and men only to serve and to adore me; I demand no riches and no sustenance because I am the universal nourisher and the master of invincible power." But this cult, to which he binds his creatures, needs mediators in order to make these same creatures he commands understand him. Apart from the generosity and mercy for man, he gave them mediators of this kind, who came forth to them, who he chose from among them. He sent apostles, and through them he communicated his commandments. Allah has predestined these believers for eternal beatification, and those non-believers are consigned to pain and eternal damnation.

The last and the seal of these mediators, apostles, and prophets is our lord, Mohammad—blessings be upon him. He made his religion the best of religions, his law the most excellent of laws, and his sect, the supreme sect. There is nothing more certain than that Jesus announced the coming of Mohammad and his mission, as Moses, son of Amram [or Imran]—blessings be upon him—announced the coming of Jesus. And though our prophet is the last of them, he was however created first.

It is among us an article for faith to believe in all the prophets, and we place no difference between them. We believe that the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary—blessings be upon him—is one of the prophets sent by Allah, though he never pretended to the titles that you bestowed upon him, nor the exaggerated means that you lent to him. Allah said of the holy mother of Jesus, “Mary, daughter of Amram, is a virgin, and that is why we blew some of our noble spirit into her breast. She believed in the word of the Lord and she was among the obedient.” Allah said of Jesus and his teachings, “Jesus, as regards to Allah, resembles Adam, whom he made of clay, and then he said: Fiat et factum est [And so it happened].” And he added, “The Messiah, son of Mary, was but sent by Allah, and his words and part of his spirit he projected onto Mary. Believe therefore in Allah and his Prophet and say not that Allah has three forms. Allah is alone and far above having a son; all that is in the skies and the earth are his, and for me this is a sufficient guarantor for the Allah that I advance. The Messiah himself does not deny this truth, nor does he refuse the character of servant of Allah, no more than the angels who approach the divine throne.” Any man who refuses to be Allah’s servant is proud, and Allah will reveal his pride before the great assembly on the day of judgement.

One must believe that Allah brought the Messiah and that the Jews—Allah curse them—neither killed nor crucified him, but disguised him amongst themselves, and he will descend (upon earth) before the day (of judgment), where he will find the Mahdi of the Muslim nation, descendant of the line of Fatima, daughter of Mohammad, our prophet, and that he will war with the Antichrist. He will find that the world has already settled to pray to Allah behind the Mahdi (and to recognize him as imam, the great preacher). The Mahdi will say to Jesus, “Come, O prophet of Allah, or rather spirit of Allah (and be his preacher). But Jesus will reply, “It is upon you that this

has been decided.” And so, Jesus will pray behind a man of the sect of Mohammad, and then he will govern the world according to the law of Mohammad—salvation be upon him!—and they will kill the Antichrist. Although the Christians will repudiate Jesus-Christ; which is why he kills them and the Jews until the stone speaks, “O prophet of Allah, this Jew whom you wanted to die, kill him!” This was announced to us by our Lord Allah when he said, “That which we told to Mohammad who complained that the Messiah, son of Mary, will bring upon us a government of vigorous justice, because he will break the cross into pieces and kill the swine. He will establish a tribute, and he will receive such riches that no one will fail to accept and recognize the Muslims and he himself as the friends of our Prophet Mohammad.”

The arrival of the Messiah will occur at the hour of asr [the afternoon prayer time]. The Messiah will find the Mahdi standing, ready for prayers, which will be already announced (by the mujahidin) and the Muslim arranged behind him. The Mahdi, addressing the Messiah, will tell him, “Pass in front, O prophet of Allah, and fulfill the duties of imam.” The Messiah—blessings be upon him—will reply to the Mahdi, “I will do no such thing, for it is before you that the prayer is announced.” And so, the Messiah will pray as a simple supplicant behind a man of the nation of the prophet. And he will be judged according to the law of the Mohammad, and he will kill the Antichrist.

The Christians will renounce the Messiah who kills them, and even kills the Jews; and if a Jew seeks refuge behind a rock, the rock will cry out to the Messiah, “O prophet of Allah, here is a Jew hiding behind me, kill him!” All that was announced by our Lord Allah—blessings be upon him—who added, “I swear to by he who holds the life of Mohammad in his hands! From among you the Messiah will descend a just judge to break the cross and kill the swine.” He will abolish the jizya [the Islamic tax upon non-Muslims], which will no longer serve a purpose, since there will be no other religion but Islam. And he will spread his riches in such profusion that all will be sated; he will be counted among the companions of our Prophet—salvation and blessings be upon him.

Several Christian princes and kings knew this and were persuaded to follow, such as Nedjachi, King of Abyssinia [present Ethiopia], and so many companions did he provide to Mohammad. The Prophet prayed to Allah for him and for his conversion to the Muslim faith, as he also invited Caesar (or Heraclius) king of Roum [Rome], the forebear of the king at whose court you reside. Mohammad—blessings be upon him—having written to the emperor to convert, he [Heraclius] read this letter and invitation with due consideration, as he possessed, this great prince, the most profound sciences; and he spoke with Arabs at his court about the qualities of Mohammad, his affairs, his habits, and the commandments and prohibitions he imposed upon his people. Then, he said, “Truly, this is the expected prophet announced by Jesus; he will reign over the place of my ancestors for two hundred years.” Then, he held a council to discuss his conversion with the great men and religious leaders of the land. They raised a tumult and withdrew like wild asses. He consoled them in the interest of preserving his crown. When our Prophet heard of this, he said, “It is in the interest of the kingdom and the crown that his ambitions are restrained, because the recognition of the true religion is deeply ingrained in his heart, and he is convinced that our excellent law is above all others, but he cannot so decide without risking his crown.”⁴

That being so, it is certain that our religion is the true one, and that [orthodoxy] such that Allah brought forth and for which Mohammad was made the steward, is the most excellent of religions. Allah said in the Qur'an, which is the book of our laws, “Allah only recognizes one religion and, when one follows another, he will no longer be taken into account, and, in the next world, he will be among the damned.” And so, he who considered things seriously and in good faith, will weigh religions in balancing justice and reason; he will recognize the Muslim religion is the true religion, and that all others are but trifles and pleasantries, since the day Allah sent our Prophet, after which he will sent no other; that is why we call him the seal of the prophets. He will be persuaded that all other religions are vain, superstitious, and their followers are damned.

A certain great jurist among the Christians wanted to know about the various beliefs of the followers of different religions in order to judge which was the best. He considered what the Muslims professed, what the

Christians professed, and what the Jews professed; and he wanted to be guided by the laws of reason. To this end, he addressed a Christian:

“Which is the best religion, Christianity, Judaism, or Islam?”

“Christianity,” the Christian replied.

“And what is the better between the Jews and the Muslims?”

“The Muslims,” answered the Christian.

Then, the jurist addressed himself to a Jew. “Which is the best religion, Muslim, Christianity, or Judaism?”

“Judaism,” responded the Jew.

“And between Islam and Christianity?”

“Islam,” replied the Jew.

Then, the jurist addressed himself to a Muslim. “Which is the best of all the religions?”

“Islam,” responded the Muslim.

“And which is the best of these two, Judaism or Christianity?”

“Neither is worth anything, because the true and enduring religion is Islam.”

It was by this reasoning that the Christian jurist came to understand that the Muslim religion was true, and that the Christian and Jewish faiths were nothing, and all other religions were pure error. This truth is well noted in our Qur'an, when Allah said: “The Jews said that the divine books of the Christians were not the correct path; but they were all in error.”

All of the above is but to introduce you to a bit of Qur'anic verses, the advice of the Prophet, and arguments according to reason, conforming to the statutes of this true religion, and to persuade you that all others are

damned. It is why, if you wish to seriously consider the question, avoiding prejudice, if you prefer the other life to this, and if you wish to enter paradise rather than hell, this is what I reveal to show you the way. Trust me, and follow this which is the true religion. Make the testimony of faith, in pronouncing that there is but one God and Mohammad is his prophet; because he who pronounces this with his words and his heart will be admitted to paradise; when he shall have made the pronouncement once his life, he will enter by the intercession of Mohammad—blessings be upon him—because this great prophet is charged with protecting sinners, even those criminals who have incurred Allah's greatest wrath. Allah, the maker of souls from the beginning of the creation, gave him this privilege. I swear to you by Allah who is great, that if you choose this religion, Allah will show you his grace. Do as Caesar (or Heraclius) who believed in his soul and was so persuaded; choose this faith at the peril of your life and property; I asked Allah with all my heart. Such is the religious matter that I wished to bring to your attention.

With regard to political affairs, if you wish to remain loyal to your infidel religion, it is certain that the religion of your English nation is lighter and more accommodating for you than that for the adoration of the Cross and obedience to those who give a son to Allah. What advantage do you see for yourself being outside your country, far from your people and your subjects and removed from the religion of your fathers and ancestors, in embracing a religion other than that of your people? While in general all your sects are a catalogue of errors, your true sect is that of Henry [the Eighth], which is more reasonable than the others which are mired in infidelity. There was but the queen, your spouse, who is French, who brought you to embrace her religion and separated you from the others. And why is it necessary for you to stay in France, abandoning your people and the kingdom of your father and your brother to another and suffer a Dutchman assuming your crown? By Allah the great, I suffer that your house and your kingdom are under the government of a Dutchman. It would be better for you to abandon the source of difference with your people, for your people believe that it is an obligation of conscience that they renounce you, because of your religion, which is contrary to theirs. Ask their pardon and overwhelm them with your integrity to make them come back. By Allah, I swear, if we were not Arab peoples, and a people unskilled in the maritime arts, or if we had someone

here who was adept at this art to whom we could confer the command of troops, I would write to the English and send you troops with which you could descend upon England, return to your estates, and remount your throne.

But there is an obstacle that I relate to you, and that is the necessity of your leaving France and that you go to Lisbon, Portugal. There is the Queen, wife of your late brother, and she has influence with Parliament. If you were there, there would be less distance between you and your people; it would be much easier for you to engage with them. But this must be done in such a way that the French no idea about what you are doing, for if they perceive that you have such designs, they will not allow you to go for two reasons: first, because they would not like you to abandon their religion for that of your nation, the second that they fear that if you return to your people, you will become their enemy and will make war upon them, and, having such knowledge of them and the qualities of their county; kings always fear these kind of things.

Such is our counsel and we have brought up that which we should do on the subject of your religion and your politics. I beseech you not to doubt this direction and good advice.

We have also learned that you intend to go to Rome, but take care with such a resolution, because, if you go there once, you will become accustomed to the place and you will not want to leave it, and afterward you will not be able to return home.

Briefly, however things happen, if you reach an accommodation with your people and if you return to your religion, we will renew our treaties we had with your brother. Our ambassador who was at his court never ceased to talk about his integrity and kindnesses; this was the cause for my writing to you to offer this advice, desiring that there be between us a friendship and a correspondence which might be useful to you, if it pleases Allah, salvation to he who follows the right path.

Written on the 15th of the lunar month of Cha'ban, in the year Hegira 1109 [February 25, 1698].

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

arma. A mixed-race group of Malian people descended from sixteenth-century Moroccan invaders and Songhay women.

arquebus (also harquebus). A matchlock gun invented in the fifteenth century, which was portable but heavy and was usually fired from a support.

baraka. A blessing regarded in various Eastern religions as an indwelling spiritual force and divine gift inhering in saints, charismatic leaders, and natural objects.

bay'ah. An oath of allegiance under Islamic tradition on behalf of the subjects by leading members of the tribe; this oath implies mutual responsibility in that so long as the leader abides by certain requirements toward his people, they are to maintain their allegiance to him.

caïd (also qaid). A Muslim local administrator, judge, and tax collector in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

caliph. A person considered a religious successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammad, and a leader of the entire Muslim community.

chorfa. See sharif. A Moroccan term meaning holy lineage.

douar. A Maghrebian term for a fixed or mobile group of familial dwellings.

ducat. The currency of Spain and much of Europe in the sixteenth century and later periods.

ghazi. A Muslim warrior.

hadith. A traditional account of the words, actions, or habits of the Prophet Muhammad; second only to the Qur'an in developing Islamic jurisprudence and an important tool for understanding the holy book of Islam.

hajj (also hadj). The pilgrimage to Mecca prescribed as a religious duty for Muslims.

haratin. A dark-skinned ethnic group of agriculturalists originating in the oasis regions of premodern Morocco.

imam. The prayer leader of a mosque or a Muslim leader of the line of Ali held by Shiites to be the divinely appointed, sinless, infallible successors of Muhammad, or any of various rulers who claim descent from Muhammad and exercise spiritual and temporal leadership over a Muslim region.

jihad (also jihad). A holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty.

kafir. An Arabic term for an infidel/nonbeliever (in the tenets of Islam).

kasbah. A North African castle or fortress.

Maghreb (also Maghrib). The geographic reference to northwestern Africa.

mahalla. The mobile imperial court of the Moroccan sultanate.

Mahdi. In Islamic eschatology, the Mahdi (the “Guided One”) is the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rule for seven, nine, or nineteen years (according to various interpretations) before the Day of Judgment and rid the world of wrongdoing, injustice, and tyranny.

makhzen. The governing elite of Morocco, including the sultan and his ministers and advisers and the military commanders, nobles, tribal chiefs, and wealthy landowners.

moor. A member of the Muslim population (of mixed Arab and Berber origins) of Spain, Portugal, and northwestern Africa.

morisco. A Spanish Muslim converted to Christianity.

mitqal (also spelled mithqal). A unit of measurement; one mitqal equals 4.25 grams or 0.13664 troy ounces.

mufti. A professional jurist who interprets Muslim law.

Niger Bend. The arc of the Niger River as it passes north toward the Sahara Desert and turns southerly near Timbuktu toward the Gulf of Guinea.

qadi. An Islamic judge.

Qur'an (also Koran). The book composed of writings accepted by Muslims as revelations made to Muhammad by Allah and as the divinely authorized basis for the religious, social, civil, commercial, military, and legal regulations of the Islamic world.

sharif (plural shurafa). (1) A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, or (2) (broadly) one of noble ancestry or political preeminence in predominantly Islamic countries.

shaykh (also sheik, shaikh). An honorific title in the Arabic language for elder that carries the meaning of a leader or an Islamic scholar.

Sudanese (also West Sudanese). A person from, or descended from people of, the Western Sudan.

ulama (also ulema). A group of Muslim theologians and scholars who are professionally occupied with the elaboration and interpretation of the Muslim legal system from a study of its sources in the Qur'an and hadith; they function individually as teachers, jurisconsults, and theologians and constitute the highest body of religious authorities in Islam.

ummah. The (broader) Muslim community.

Western Sudan. A broad swath of land extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Lake Chad in the east.

zakat. A charitable contribution (almsgiving) required of all Muslims according to their means.

zawiya (plural zaway). A Moroccan Sufi brotherhood.

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ENDNOTES

Preface

1 John Windus, *A Journey to Mequinez: The Residence of the Present Emperor of Fez and Morocco on the Occasion of Commodore Stewart's Embassy of Thither for the Redemption of British Captives in 1721* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1725), 118.

2 Louis de Chénier, *Recherches historiques sur les Maures et Histoire de l'empire du Maroc*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Polytype, 1787), 418–420. My translation.

3 Younes Nekrouf, *Moulay Ismail and Louis XIV: une amitié orageuse* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987), 254. My translation.

4 Issa Babana Al Alaoui, *Histoire de la dynastie régnante au Maroc* (Paris: Fabert, 2008), 49. My translation.

5 Younes Nekrouf, *Moulay Ismail and Louis XIV: une amitié orageuse* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987), 10. My translation.

6 François Pidou de Saint-Olon, *Estat présent de l'empire de Maroc* (Paris: M. Brunet, 1964), 177. My translation.

Chapter 1

1 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), 38.

2 Interestingly, the average lifespan of Moroccan dynasties prior to the Alaouites correlates with Ibn Khaldūn’s assessment of the duration of a ruling house being roughly a century. See, Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 138.

3 Jamil Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghreb in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 14; Daniel Rivet, *Histoire du Maroc de Moulay Idriss à Mohammed VI* (Paris: Fayard, 2012), 39.

4 Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xxv.

5 R. G. Jenkins, “The Evolution of Religious Brotherhoods in Northwest Africa,” in *Studies in West African History* (London: Cass, 1979), 63.

6 Ibid., 50.

7 Benson Akutse Mojuetan, *History and Underdevelopment in Morocco: The Structural Roots of Conjuncture* (Münster, Germany: LIT Verlag, 1997), 11, 27; Victor Piquet, *Le Maroc: Géographie—Histoire mise en valeur* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1918), 166–67.

8 Henri Terrasse, *Histoire du Maroc* (Casablanca, Morocco: Atlatides, 1950), 125–26.

9 Abun-Nasr, 220–21.

10 *Histoire du Maroc* (Paris: Hatier, 1967), 230.

11 Ibid., 226–27; Thomas K. Park and Aomar Boum, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 180.

12 *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, 103; Ernest Mercier, *Histoire de l’Afrique septentrionale (Berbérie) depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à la conquête française (1830)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, ed., 1888), 221–22; *Histoire du Maroc* (Hatier), 224–25; Abun-Nasr, 225–26.

13 La Grande Encyclopédie du Maroc: Histoire (Italy: GEP, 1987), 94; Abun-Nasr, 220.

14 Ibn Khaldûn, 255-56.

15 La Grande Encyclopédie du Maroc: Géographie Humaine (Italy: GEP, 1987), 12.

16 Bernard Rosenberger, Le Maroc au seuil de la modernité (Paris: Trois Cultures, 2008), 190.

17 Ibid., 197. My translation.

18 La Grande Encyclopédie du Maroc: Géographie Humaine (Italy: GEP, 1987), 12–13.

19 Spain and Portugal had been politically joined in 1580, after the last of the Portuguese kings of the House of Aviz-Béja died. The union was deeply unpopular in Portugal and effectively ended with the start of the Portuguese Restoration War (1640–1668), after which the House of Braganza was established as Portugal's new ruling dynasty.

Chapter 2

1 Ibn Khaldûn, 131.

2 In other words, they were of Hassanian origin. Hassan and Hussein were the only progeny of the union of Ali and Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad. See El Alaoui, 20. The Saadians maintained themselves to be an offshoot of the third-generation descendants of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, and Ali, the other being the Idrissids (the first Muslim dynasty of Morocco). According to this scheme, after another fifteen generations came a split between the Saadians and Alaouties. The Alaouites denied the Saadian chorfa; they would later claim that the Saadians issued from the

Prophet's wet nurse. The Alaouites traced twenty-eight generations from Fatima to Moulay Sharif. See Nabil Mouline, *Le Califat Imaginaire d'Ahmad Al-Mansur* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 63; The Awai Genealogy, <http://www.royalark.net/Morocco/morocco2.htm>

3 Terrasse, 131; Aḥmad ibn Ḥālid al-Nāṣirī, *Kitab el-istiqlā li akhbar doual el-Maghrib el-Aqṣa* (Chronique de la dynastie alaouite au Maroc) Archives marocaines, vol. 9, trans. E. Fumey, ed. Ernest Le Roux (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), 5; Budgett Meakin, *The Moorish Empire: A Historical Epitome* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1899), 137.

4 Al-Nāṣirī, 18.

5 Terrasse, 242–43.

6 Al-Nāṣirī, 48–54.

7 Larbi Essakali, *Le Memorial du Maroc*, Vol. 5, 1600–1780: De la Grandeur aux Intrigues (Paris: Nord Organization, 1982), 44.

8 Abd al-Qasim bin Ahmad al-Zayyānī, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, trans. O. Houdas, ed. Ernest Le Roux (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1906), 23; al-Nāṣirī, 57. Several Western versions of this accident alleged that Moulay Rachid was intoxicated with wine at the time of his death, but this is not mentioned in an Islamic account and cannot be verified. See Saint-Olon, 8; Wilfred Blunt, *Black Sunrise: The Life and Times of Mulai Ismail, Emperor of Morocco, 1646–1727* (London: Methuen, 1951), 17.

9 Defontin-Maxange, *Le Grand Ismail: Emperor du Maroc* (Paris: Marpon, 1929), 31. The author cites Abraham where he should have mentioned his father, Joseph Maïmoran. This is probably an error. See Dominique Busnot, *Histoire de le règne de Moulay Ismail* (New York: Ishi, 2002), 45–47. Interestingly, al-Nāṣirī makes no mention of this. See Al-Nāṣirī, 59.

10 El Glaoui, 45.

11 Al-Nāṣirī, 60–61.

12 Al-Nāṣirī, 60; el Alaoui, 443; Chouki El Hamri, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Newark, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 164.

13 Defontin, 22–23. My translation.

14 Ibid., 210–211.

15 Thomas K. Park and Aomar Boum, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 244; Abun Nasr, 234.

16 Al-Nāṣirī, 65–66.

17 Ibid., 71.

Chapter 3

1 Jacques Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire des Alaouites (1268–1971)* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), 72.

2 Al-Nāṣirī, 74–75; El Hamel, 160–161; Memorial, vol. 5, 50–51.

3 A mitqal (also spelled mithqal) is a unit of measurement, with 1 mitqal equal to 4.25 grams or .13664 troy ounces.

4 Al-Nāṣirī, 74–75.

5 Bible, King James Version, accessed January 2, 2016. Available at <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-Chapter-9/#-23-#25>. The life of Ham is related in Genesis 9:20–27. The curse of Ham is truly a convoluted affair. The basics are that Noah became intoxicated and fell asleep in his tent. His sons, Ham, Shem, and Japeth, approached his tent. Ham went in and looked upon his father's naked form. He turned and went outside to tell the others what he had seen. Shem and Japeth then entered

the tent, averting their eyes as they covered their father. When he learned of Ham's disrespectful treatment, Noah placed a curse on Ham's son, Canaan. Theologians, both Jewish and Christian, have been squabbling for centuries about how to interpret this story.

6 El Hamel, 67–68.

7 Ibn Khaldun, 63, 117.

8 El Hamel, 72.

9 Ibid., 183–84.

10 Bovill, 140.

11 Mohammad El Fasi, “Biographie de Moulay Ismail,” Hespéris-Tamuda: numéro spécial publié à l'occasion du troisième centenaire de l'accession au trône de Moulay Ismael (Rabat, Morocco: L'Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines, 1962), 17.

12 Ibid., 170–71.

13 Memorial, vol. 5, 50–51.

14 Michel Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc* (Paris: Perrin, 2009), 280.

15 Windus, 215.

16 El Hamel, 173–74. The author noted a discrepancy in the official register, the Jany al-Azhar wa Nur al-Abhar, which included tribes from which these slaves were taken. When added up, this number comes to 219,320. El Hamel speculates that the difference may come from the slaves rounded up during one of Moulay Ismail's expeditions south of the Sous Valley.

17 Al-Nāṣirī, 77.

18 Windus, 142. The term alcayde (or alcaide) is Iberian, meaning the commander of a fortress. The use of the term here suggests “caïd” or a local

Muslim official.

19 Ibid., 141–42.

20 Germain Moüette, *Relation de la captivité du Sr. Moüette dans les royaumes de Fez et de Maroc* (Paris: Jean Cochard, 1683), 101.

21 Allan R. Myers, “Class, Ethnicity, and Slavery: The Origins of the Moroccan ‘Abid,’” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 449.

22 Windus, 138.

23 Al-Nāṣirī, 77; El Hamel, 188–90; Terrasse, 257. The number of fighting men of the Abid al-Bukhari can only be estimated, since there were no official records and the accounts of historians and chroniclers varied widely. According to al-Nāṣirī, the sultan raised 150,000 black troops; most accounts placed the number much lower, at between 30,000 and 60,000 troops. De Léon’s figure of 50,000, based upon firsthand information, seems a reliable compromise. See Chantal de La Veronne, *Vie de Moulay Ismaïl, roi de Fès et de Maroc: d’après Joseph de Léon (1708–1728)* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1974), 56.

24 Meaning: “After me, the deluge.” This has been attributed to French King Louis XV or his mistress Madame de Pompadour. Sometimes quoted as *Après nous, le déluge* (“After us, the deluge”).

Chapter 4

1 Windus, 116.

2 Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary, Corsairs, Conquests and Captivity in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean* (New York: Riverhead Books,

2010), 244; Eric Ross, Presenting Morocco's Imperial Cities (World Press.com, 11 Oct 2013), n.p.

3 Francis Ramirez and Christian Rolot, Meknes: Cité impériale; Histoire d'une mélancolie (Paris: ACR Editions, 2004), 25. This gate was completed by Moulay Abdallah in 1732.

4 Michel Abitbol, Histoire du Maroc (Paris: Perrin, 2009), 277–78; Andrew Peters, Dictionary of Islamic Architecture (New York: Routledge, 1999), 184–85. Benfaida maintains that the walls extended over some forty-five kilometers. Much of the first and second walls have disappeared over time.

5 Windus, 101, 112–114.

6 Mostafa Benfaida, Meknes: Un Musée à Ciel Ouvert (Meknes, Morocco: Presse Meknes, 2011), 84.

7 Ibid., 112.

8 Ibid., 96.

9 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812, 28.

10 Ramirez, 14–16; Dominique Busnot, Histoire de le règne de Moulay Ismail (New York: Ishi, 2002), 81.

11 Benfaida, 99.

12 Ibid., 99, 106.

13 Busnot said that the stables were home to only six hundred horses (Busnot, 79). Windus gave the number of horses as 1,000, with another 10,000 stabled at another location three leagues away (Windus, 174–75). De Léon quoted a figure of 3,000 (La Veronne, 33). However, the most common figure quoted for these stables in the imperial city is 12,000 (al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 28), which seems excessive, even by Moulay Ismail's standards.

14 Al-Nāṣirī, 72. An empan or span is the distance measured by a human hand, from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger. In ancient times, a span was considered to be half a cubit. Sometimes the distinction is made between the great span (thumb to little finger) and little span (index finger to little finger, or about nine inches).

15 Al-Nāṣirī, 71–73.

16 Ramirez, 28.

17 Ibid., 147.

18 Windus, 132, 148; Busnot, 103–108; Pellow, 63-64, 70. Of the few names of victims quoted by these sources, only one comes close to a name mentioned in the Franciscan records of Christians killed by Ismail's own hand, a certain Abraham Lièvre (Koehler, 436). Busnot (103) refers to Abraham Odièvre. See Henry Koehler, "Les exécutions sanglantes de Moulay Ismael et les captifs chrétiens d'après un manuscrit inédit de son temps," *Bulletin hispanique* (1933): 35–4, 428–447. Accessed 1 February 2019. Available at https://www.persee.fr/doc/hispa_0007-4640_1933_num_35_4_2597

19 Blunt, 62. It is interesting that Dominique Busnot (44) used the same theater analogy to describe the ever-changing nature of Ismail's Palace City.

20 Windus, 116.

21 Al-Zayyânî advanced the figure of 25,000 Christian and 30,000 Muslim captives. See al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812*, 54. See also Anastase Goudal, *Meknes, capitale d'empire et cité mariale* (Issoudun, France: Laboureur et Cie, 1959), 68; Meakin, 156; Ramirez, 18; Windus, 195.

22 Windus, 155.

23 Pellow, 69.

24 Windus, 111–12.

Chapter 5

1 Hussain Mohammed al-Amily, *The Book of Arabic Wisdom: Provers and Anecdotes* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2005), 62.

2 Germain Moüette (1651–1691) was a Frenchman from Rambouillet who, at the age of nineteen, was captured by Barbary corsairs while en route to the Americas. Sold into slavery at Salé, he passed through several owners before winding up in Meknes, where he labored on the Palace City. With the help of a benevolent master, Moüette learned Arabic and Spanish, which allowed him greater access to information about his environment. In 1681, after eleven years of captivity, Moüette was redeemed by the Mercedarians. Two years later, he published his account of the experience, titled *Relation de la captivité du Sr. Moüette dans les royaumes de Fez et de Maroc*.

3 Germain Moüette, *Relation de la captivité du Sr. Moüette dans les royaumes de Fez et de Maroc* (Paris: Jean Cochart, 1683), 5–7.

4 Ibid., 30–37.

5 Ibid., 116–23.

6 François Pouillon, *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris : Karthala Éditions, 2008), 710–711; Moüette, 44–45. It is rather curious that Moüette provided such a paucity of detail about his relationship with Bougiman, given that the Frenchman's survival and his subsequent Relation were the fruits of this contact.

7 Moüette, 103.

8 Ibid., 102. My translation.

9 Ibid., 116–17.

10 Ramirez, 24. Part of the prison collapsed in the 1755 earthquake. See also Moüette, 68–69.

11 Ibid., 64–66.

12 Ibid., 150. My translation.

13 Ibid., 66.

14 Ibid., 92–99.

15 Ibid., 104–08.

16 The Royal, Celestial and Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy and the Redemption of the Captives, also known as the Mercedarians, is a Catholic mendicant order established in 1218 by St. Peter Nolasco in the city of Barcelona, for the redemption of Christian captives.

17 Moüette, 125–26.

18 Ibid., 135–37.

19 Ibid., 134–39.

20 Ibid., 139–43.

21 Ibid., 99.

22 Ibid., 143.

Chapter 6

1 Ibn Khaldun, 131.

2 Referred to as Aid al-Adha in most of the Islamic world.

3 La Grande Encyclopédie du Maroc: Histoire, 102.

4 Al-Nāṣirī, 67; Terrasse, 255; al-Alaoui, 45.

5 Defontin-Maxange, 125–26.

6 The name of this pass also is given as Teniet Elguelaoui. See al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 33; Mercier, 290.

7 Al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 33–34; al-Nāṣirī, 80–81; Mercier, 290; Defontin-Maxange, 83.

8 Al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 34.

9 Special Dictionary.com, “182 Moroccan Proverbs,” accessed 22 August 2018. Available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/m/moroccan_proverb/4.htm

10 Al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 31.

11 Ibid., 34–35.

12 Ibid., 37–38; al-Nāṣirī, 87–88.

13 Ibid., 38–39; al-Nāṣirī, 90.

14 Al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 34–37.

15 Ibid., 39; al-Nāṣirī, 90.

16 Al-Zayyānī, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 39–40.

17 Special Dictionary.com, “Moroccan Proverbs,” accessed 22 August 2018. Available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/m/moroccan_proverb/9.htm

Chapter 7

1 Blunt, 185–86.

2 Tinniswood, 177–80.

3 “Palmes Fairborne,” Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder, 1885–1900), 120.

4 F. M. G Routh, Tangiers: England’s Lost Atlantic Outpost (1661–1684) (London: John Murray, 1912), 32–33.

5 Ibid., 337.

6 Ibid., 155–59.

7 Tinniswood, 199–201.

8 Routh, 161.

9 Ibid., 66–69; Tinniswood, 179. The figures of survivors differ between these accounts. I opted for Routh’s number.

10 Routh, 165–66.

11 Ibid., 163.

12 Ibid., 175–78; Tinniswood, 185. Routh cites fifty-seven Englishmen captured from May 13 to May 14, but this probably includes men from Charles and other forts.

13 Ibid., 180.

14 Tinniswood, 202–03.

15 “Sir Palmes and Stafford Fairborne,” Westminster Abbey, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/sir-palmes-and-stafford-fairborne/>

16 Routh, 240.

17 Ibid., 254.

18 Ibid., 248–264; Blunt, 185.

19 Blunt, 183.

20 A person who rides the leading left-hand horse of a team or pair drawing a coach or carriage, especially when there is no coachman.

21 Routh, 269.

22 Ibid., 271.

Chapter 8

1 Special Dictionary.com, “Moroccan Proverbs,” accessed 26 December 2018, available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/m/moroccan_proverb/8.htm

2 Al-Amily, 165.

3 Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc*, 284–5; Windus, 122.

4 Ibid., 124.

5 Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc*, 285.

6 Ibid., 285; Encyclopédie, *Histoire*, 105, 108; Hatier, 246.

7 Memorial, vol. 5, 52.

8 Encyclopédie, *Agriculture-Pêche*, 27.

9 Al-Nāṣirī, 66–68.

10 Hatier, 248; Saint-Olon, 145–6; Windus, 206.

11 Abun-Nasr, 233.

12 Special Dictionary.com, “Moroccan Proverbs,” accessed 26 December 2018, available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/m/moroccan_proverb/8.htm

13 John Braithwaite, *History of the Revolutions in the Empire of Morocco upon the Death of the late Emperor Mouley Ishmael* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1739), 34–35. Braithwaite (1696–1740) was an English officer who had participated in the siege of Gibraltar in 1727. After this action, he crossed over to Morocco with the British consul-general, John Russel. The experiences of these months he relates in his book, *History of the Revolutions in the Empire of Morocco*, published in 1729.

14 Ennaji, 88, 98–99.

15 Encyclopédie, *Géographie Humaine*, 12–13.

16 Moüette, 66.

17 These cyclical catastrophes would continue unabated through the nineteenth century. A French census of Morocco in 1914 measured approximately five million inhabitants, for a population decline over the four hundred years since Leo’s estimate. Encyclopédie, *Géographie Humaine*, 13.

18 Pellow, 104.

19 Busnot, 67. My translation.

20 Windus, 86–87.

21 Encyclopédie, *Histoire*, 105. My translation.

22 Ibid., 108.

23 Busnot, 66–67; Saint-Olon, 114.

24 Léon Nicolas Godard, *Description et histoire du Maroc: comprenant la géographie et la statistique de ce pays d'après les renseignements les plus récents et le tableau du régime des souverains qui l'ont gouverné depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à la paix de Tétouan en 1860*, ed. Ch. Tanera (Paris: Librairie de l'art militaire, 1860), 514. My translation.

25 Pellow, 115, 131.

26 Henry de Castries, *Moulay Ismail et Jacques II: Une apologie de l'Islam par un sultan du Maroc* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1903), 20. My translation.

27 Al-Amily, 114.

Chapter 9

1 Poetry Archive, *O Navis*, accessed 1 August 2018, available at http://www.poetry-archive.com/v/o_navis.html, accessed September 24, 2018.

2 J. H. Elliot and Neil Pinches, *Imperial Spain 1469–1716* (London: Penguin, 1963), Kindle Edition, section 4999.

3 Will Durant and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Louis XIV: A History of European Civilization in the Period of Pascal, Molière, Cromwell, Milton, Peter the Great, Newton, and Spinoza: 1648–1715* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 448.

4 Ibid., 499; Lady Callcott, *A Short History of Spain*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1840), 500. The figures of those immolated varies between these sources. Durant's account cites 21, Callcott's 19. I opted for the more recent.

5 Elliot, section 6014.

6 Mercier, 291–92.

7 Defontin-Maxange, 162.

8 Discover Islamic Art/Mahdiyya Kasbah, accessed August 10, 2018, available at http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=monuments;ISL;ma;Mon01;31;en

9 Defontin-Maxange, 162–65; al-Zayyânî, Maroc 1631–1812, 36.

10 Discover Islamic Art/Mahdiyya Kasbah, available at http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=monuments;ISL;ma;Mon01;31;en

11 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 42–43; al-Nâṣirî, 97–98; Defontin-Maxange, 168. Al-Nâṣirî reported that a Spanish historian recorded that the siege lasted five months, and, more importantly, that Louis XIV sent five frigates to help blockage the fort. This is plausible, since the two countries were at war, but it is not mentioned elsewhere. Moulay Ismail's letter to the pasha of Timbuktu, written in the winter of 1689–90, provides a slightly different account of the number of Spanish captured and killed, as well as the war materiel taken. See Michel Abitbol, Tombouctou et les Arma: De la conquête marocaine du Soudan nigérien en 1591 à l'hégémonie de l'empire peul du Maçina en 1853 (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979), 247.

12 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 43; al-Nâṣirî, 103–04.

13 Al-Nâṣirî, 104; Mercier, 318.

14 Durant, 453.

Chapter 10

1 Special Dictionary.com, “African Proverbs,” accessed 17 August 2018, available at: http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/a/african_proverb/22.htm

2 Special Dictionary.com, “Turkish Proverbs,” accessed 17 August 2018, available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/t/turkish_proverb/44.htm

3 Michel Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma*, 108.

4 The “bend” refers to the arc of the Niger River as it passes north toward the Sahara and turns southeasterly beyond Timbuktu toward the Gulf of Guinea.

5 The three principal West African gold fields were Bambouk on the upper Senegal River, Bouré on the upper Niger, and Lobi in the south of modern Burkina Faso.

6 Abderrahman Ben Abdallah Ben ‘Imran Ben Amir Es-Sa’di, *Tarikh es-Soudan: Documents arabes relative à l’histoire du Soudan* (Paris: Librairie de la Société Asiatique, 1900), 291.

7 Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma*, 94–96.

8 Ibid., 92.

9 Ibid., 86.

10 Ibid., 98.

11 Ibid., 118–19. See also *Tedzkiret en-Nisiān Akhbar Molouk es-Soudan*, trans. O. Houdas, ed. Ernest LeRoux (Paris: Librairie de la Société Asiatique d’école des langues orientales vivantes, 1901), 146.

12 Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma*, 247–48. My translation.

13 Abitbol recorded that al-Tazarkini's tenure ran the twenty months between November 1688 and July 1690. This does not accord with the Tedzkiret, which recorded his ten-month tenure from October 1689 and July 1690. I opted for the latter reference. See Tedzkiret, 146; Abitbol, Tombouctou et les Arma, 251.

14 Al-Nāṣirī, 76–77.

15 A. G. P. Martin, Quatre Siècles d'Histoire Marocaine au Sahara de 1504 à 1902; au Maroc de 1894 à 1912 (Paris: Librairie Félix Alean, 1923), 37–70.

16 Abû al Qâsim ben Ahmad ben Ali ben Ibrahim al-Zayyânî, "Histoire de la dynastie sa'dide." Excerpt from al-Turguman al-mu'rib'an duwal al-Masriq wal Magrib, Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée, no. 23, trans. and notes L. Mougin et H. Hamburger, ed. Roger Le Tourneau (1977), 15; Mohammad Esseghir Ben Elhadj Ben Abdallah el-Oufrani, Nohzet-el hādi bi akhbar moulouk el-Karn el-Hadi: 1511–1670 (Histoire de la dynastie Saadienne au Maroc: 1511–1670) (Paris: Ernest LeRoux ed., 1889), 79.

17 It must be added, however, that the Ottoman state did experience once brief period of contraction before 1699; that occurred after the young Turkish emirate was nearly annihilated by Timur and the Turco-Mongol forces at Battle of Ankara in 1402. The state experienced a period of civil conflict until it recovered in 1413.

18 History of Ottoman Algeria, eds. Lambert M. Surhone, Mariam T. Tenoe, Susan F. Henssonow (Betascript Publishing, 2010), 31–32.

19 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 32.

20 Mercier, 312.

21 Ibid., 317.

22 Gábor Agoston and Bruce Martins, Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 410–11, 393.

23 Mercier, 322; History of Ottoman Algeria, 35.

Chapter 11

1 Wide World of Quotes.com, accessed 3 February 2019, available at <https://www.wideworldofquotes.com/authors/l/king-louis-xiv-of-france.html>

2 Al-Alaoui, 50.

3 A reference to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (1610–1641), the first (Eastern) Roman emperor to confront Muslim armies during the initial period of Islamic expansion.

4 Nekrouf, 79; Defontin-Maxange, 130. My translation.

5 Al-Nāṣirī, 97–98.

6 John B. Wolf, Louis XIV, King of France (1638–1715). (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 42, 47–48, 55.

7 Ibid., 270, 362.

8 Ibid., 270.

9 Olivier Bernier, Louis XIV: A Royal Life. (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 152–53.

10 Wolf, 362.

11 Bernier, 214.

12 Ibid., 231–32.

13 Wolf, 166.

14 Bernier, 162–63.

15 Nekrouf, 72, 77.

16 Ibid., 98.

17 Ibid., 85–89.

18 Special-Dictionary.com, “Moroccan Proverbs,” accessed 8 December 2018, available at http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/m/moroccan_proverb/18.htm

19 Bernier, 236–38.

20 Nekrouf, 210.

21 Abun-Nasr, 233.

22 Bernier, 276–77.

23 Blunt, 230; Nekrouf, 322. The details of these gifts vary between accounts. Benfaida (87) asserts that Louis gifted four floor clocks to Moulay Ismail.

24 Blunt, 231.

25 Nabil Matar, *In the Land of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 199.

26 Ibid., 212–13.

27 Ibid., 204.

28 Henry de Castries, *Moulay Ismail et Jacques II*, 98.

29 Matar, 208.

30 Ibid., 213.

31 Ibid., 208.

32 Defontin-Maxange, 244. My translation: “Your beauty, great princess, hurts peoples in the wildest places; Africa capitulates before you, and the conquest of your eyes go farther than those of Hercules.”

Chapter 12

1 Voltaire, *Mahomet the Prophet or Fanaticism: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, trans. Robert L. Myers (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964), 1.

2 François Pidou de Saint-Olon (1640–1720) was born in Touraine, France. He served thrice as a diplomat for the court of Louis XIV, as ambassador to Genoa (1682–?), Madrid (1684–?), and Morocco (1689–1693). The year after his return from Morocco, Saint-Olon published an account of his mission and the general affairs of that kingdom, titled *Estat présent de l’empire de Maroc*.

3 Charles Colbert, the marquis of Croissy, was the minister of state for foreign affairs from 1680 to 1696.

4 Jean-Baptiste Estelle (1662–1723) was born in Marseille, France. His father served as consul in Algiers and later in Tétuoan, Morocco. Estelle followed in his father’s footsteps, being named French consul in Salé in 1689, a post he held until 1701. After leaving Morocco he spent several years in Syria, before returning definitively to France in 1711. Thereafter he served a term as the equivalent of a major in his hometown. He was later admitted to the nobility a few months before his death. Jacques Caillé, “Un consul de Louis XIV au Maroc,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (December 1958), 6, available at <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1958/12/CAILLE/22840>

5 Saint-Olon, 12–14.

6 Ibid., 85.

7 Ramirez, 28. Another writer recorded the number executed to be 70. See Defontin-Maxange, 124.

8 Ibid., 123–26.

9 Ibid., 153–55.

10 Saint-Olon, 58.

11 Ibid., 82–85.

12 Ibid., 52.

13 Ibid., 60–61.

14 Ibid., 62–63. My translation.

15 Ibid., 60–61. My translation.

16 Ibid., 178–79. My translation.

17 Ibid., 214. The identity of this Moroccan ambassador is unclear. Saint-Olon referred to him as Ali Abdallah; Ismail referred to him as Ali son of Abdallah; in a letter, Ali referred to himself as Ali, son of Abdallah Hamamo.

18 Ibid., 191–93. My translation.

19 Ibid., 196–97. My translation.

20 Ibid., 38–39. My translation.

Chapter 13

1 Ibn Khaldun, 97.

2 Al-Amily, 144.

3 Simon Ockley, *An Account of South-West Barbary: Containing What Is Most Remarkable in the Territories of the King of Fez and Morocco* (London: J. Bowyer, 1713), 88.

4 Ibid., 94–97.

5 Al-Amily, 193.

6 Castries, *Jacques II*, 25.

7 Generally considered to have begun in 1696, but perhaps as early as 1693. See Castries, *Jacques II*, 29.

8 El Badi Palace website, accessed 31 January 2019, available at <http://www.palais-el-badi.com/en/>

9 The sultan's share of the war booty from the Battle of Ksar el-Kébir included two thousand Christian captives, the ransoms of which were devoted in large part to the building of the El Badi Palace.

10 El-Oufrani, 181. My translation.

11 Ibid., 122–23.

12 Ibid., 124–25.

13 Al-Zayyânî said that he was assassinated in Taroudant in 1707. See Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 50. Two other accounts had him killed as the result of a plot by his father. According to Joseph de Léon La Veronne, Ismail learned of a plot by Zaydan to overthrow him, so he decided to preempt his son by sending an amicable note with gifts, including two beautiful women for the prince's harem. These women were in fact assassins who murdered Zaydan one night when he was intoxicated. The third version was much the same, but for Zaydan being suffocated by eight women of his harem. In this account, Zaydana is said to have had

three of the women eat their own breasts before having them strangled! See Windus, 121; Goddard, 525–26.

14 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 51.

15 C. R. Pennell, Morocco Since 1830 (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 28.

16 Al-Nâṣirî, 106–109. My translation.

17 Mercier, 312.

18 Braithwaite, 10.

19 Al-Nâṣirî, 128–30.

20 Ibid., 131; al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631–1812, 51–52.

Chapter 14

1 Trinitarian Order website, accessed 14 February 2019, available at <http://www.trinitari.org>

2 Dominique Busnot was a French Catholic cleric born in Rouan. He was a member of the Order of the Holy Trinity and Captives and was engaged in fundraising and missions for the redemption of captives held in Morocco. After his third trip to that kingdom, in 1714 he published his account of these mission and of the kingdom of Moulay Ismail, *Histoire du règne de Mouley Ismael, roi de Maroc, Fez, Tafilet, Souz, etc.*

3 Busnot, 34.

4 Ibid., 29.

5 Ibid., 42.

6 Ibid., 44–45.

7 Ibid., 45–47, 133.

8 Saint-Olon, 26.

9 Acmeth is not an Arabic name. This was probably a phonetic misinterpretation for Ahmad or Ahmet, two of the common transliterations of the Arabic given name, ﷺ.

10 Ibid., 49.

11 Most of Busnot's information about the Christian captives of Meknes appears to be from others—merchants, captives, and fellow men of the cloth—and not from firsthand observation. Furthermore, his account may have been influenced by the work of Germain Moüette, whose influence Busnot acknowledges in *Histoire du règne*.

12 Ibid., 116.

13 Ibid., 73.

14 Ibid., 76–78. Busnot's report of Moulay Ismail's daughters being killed at birth is almost certainly inaccurate. Infanticide was not common in Muslim culture.

15 Ibid., 76–77.

16 Ibid., 72–73.

17 Ibid., 82.

18 Ibid., 64.

19 Ibid., 66. My translation.

20 Ibid., 68–69. My translation.

21 Ibid., 66–67. My translation.

22 Ibid., 51–55.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 Ibid., 60.

25 Ibid., 86–91.

26 Ibid., 93. By *papas* Ismail meant “fathers” of the Order.

27 Ibid., 98–99. My translation.

28 Ibid., 117–28.

29 Ibid., 30–31. My translation.

Chapter 15

1 Edmund Burke Quotes, Royalark.net, accessed 14 February 2019, available at <http://www.royalark.net/>

2 Windus, 24–26.

3 Ibid., 93–95.

4 Ibid., 99.

5 Ibid., 96.

6 Ibid., 99–100.

7 Ibid., 96–97.

8 Ibid., 104.

9 First English Dictionary of Slang, 1699 (Oxford, UK: Bodleian Library, 2010), 14. A beard-splitter is a man who enjoys women.

10 Ibid., 188–90.

11 Windus cites Germaine Moüette in his Journey to Mequinez (233). We may ask ourselves to what degree this reference influenced his writing, since Windus does not admit to being an eyewitness to any of these alleged brutalities.

12 Ibid., Preface, n.p.

13 Ibid., 141.

14 Ibid., 138–39.

15 Ibid., 150.

16 Ibid., 132–33.

17 Ibid., 156–57.

18 Ibid., 187.

19 Ibid., 130, 148.

20 Ibid., 130–31.

21 Ibid., 159–71. Windus alleged that, on Pasha Hamet's suggestion, Stewart had written a letter to one of the sultan's wives to intercede with her husband on his behalf, and to help address the issue of the English captives. This is rather unlikely, for starters because the sultan's harem was strictly off limits to any outsider, even by means such as a letter.

22 Ibid., 172–74.

23 Ibid., 195.

24 Ibid., 174.

25 Ibid., 205–06.

26 Ibid., 194–95.

Chapter 16

1 The Qur'an: Online Translation and Commentary, accessed 14 February 2019, available at <http://al-quran.info/#3:116>

2 Thomas Pellow (1704–?) was a Cornishman from Penryn who was taken captive as a boy by Moorish corsairs in 1716 and spent the next twenty-three years living in Morocco. Forced to convert to Islam, he traded one life of servitude for another, from a Christian captive to a Muslim slave. He learned Arabic and attracted the attention of Moulay Ismail, who made him an attendant at the imperial court of Meknes. Later he served as an officer in the Moroccan army and conducted several bloody campaigns against recalcitrant Berber tribes. Finally escaping Morocco by sea in 1738, he returned to England and shortly thereafter published his account of those years, titled *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow, of Penryn, Mariner: Three and Twenty Years of Captivity Among the Moors*.

3 Slang, 77. Gigler meaning a wanton woman.

4 Pellow, 57–59; 63.

5 Ibid., 145.

6 Ibid., 62.

7 Ibid., 60.

8 Giles Milton, *White Gold: The Extraordinary Story of Thomas Pellow and North Africa's One Million European Slaves* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 106.

9 Ibid., 159.

10 Windus, 195.

11 Pellow, 71–72.

12 Ibid., 75–77.

13 Ibid., 81.

14 Ibid., 103.

15 Ibid., 113–17.

16 Ibid., 131–32.

17 Ibid., 155–59.

18 Milton, 209.

19 Pellow, 132, 175.

20 Ibid., 189.

21 Ibid., 184–85.

Chapter 17

1 Meakin, 161.

2 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 52.

3 Al-Nâṣirî, 132.

4 A. G. P. Martin, 79.

5 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 53; Mercier, 334. Ceuta was besieged by the Moroccans again in 1732; but for a brief English occupation in 1810, it has remained in Spanish hands.

6 Meakin, 156.

7 Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc*, 294–95.

8 Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma*, 141, 154.

9 Spain would reoccupy Oran from 1732 to 1792. Thereafter the city remained under Ottoman control until the French invaded in 1831.

10 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 52–53; al-Nâṣirî, 133–34; Abun Nasr, 236.

11 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 55.

12 Al-Nâṣirî, 137.

13 Braithwaite, 4–5.

14 Accounts differ regarding the date of Ismail's death. Al-Zayyânî (*Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 55) had it as April 4; al-Nâṣirî recorded the date as March 22 (137), which most historians have accepted. See also Pellow, 148; Godard, 535.

15 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631–1812*, 55–56.

16 Meakin, 160–61.

Epilogue

1 Alphabetically listed, these accounts are those of John Braithwaite, Francis Brooks, Dominique Busnot, Jean-Baptiste Estelle, Joseph de Léon, Germain Moüette, Simon Ockley, Thomas Pellow, Francisco Jesús María de San Juan del Puerto, Saint-Amand, François Pidou de Saint-Olon, and John Windus. As noted, Ockley was the editor and not the writer of *An Account of South-West Barbary*; that author is unknown. Del Puerto's is a history of the Franciscan mission at Meknes; however, because it was based upon numerous firsthand reports, it is included here.

2 Ockley, 47–49.

3 Busnot, 74.

4 Ockley, 94.

5 La Veronne, 1.

6 See Windus 123–25 and Pellow 137–38; Windus 132–33 and Pellow 73; also Windus 204 and Pellow 104. The editor of this reissued version of Pellow's book, Dr. Robert Brown, believes the original editor of the manuscript added Windus's passages in order to “pad out the book.” See Pellow, 34.

7 Koehler, 430.

8 Ibid., 432–445.

9 Busnot, 73. Joseph de Léon advanced the highest figure. According to him, at the time of Moulay Ismail's death the number of royal concubines had grown to 1,400. See La Veronne, 23.

10 Al-Zayyânî, *Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812*, 54.

11 This data is limited because of a general lack of record keeping in the 1700s. One study of London from data of the previous century shows an infant mortality rate of fourteen per one thousand live births; 30 percent of children died of disease by age fifteen. Lynda Payne, *Health in England*

(16th–18th c.), accessed 5 February 2019, available at
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/166>

12 Terrasse, 278. My translation.

13 El Fasi, 5–6. My translation.

14 Spain would reoccupy Larache as part of its northern protectorate from 1912 to 1956.

15 Al-ÑāÑirī, 157. My translation.

16 Mercier, 345. My translation.

17 Encyclopédie, Histoire, 109. My translation.

18 Al-ÑāÑirī, 262. My translation.

19 Al-Zayyāñī (Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812, 102) lists five periods of rule for Moulay Abdallah; Terrasse (284) lists four.

20 Pellow, 329.

21 Al-Zayyāñī, Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812, 81–84.

22 Al-ÑāÑirī, 67; Encyclopédie, Histoire, 109.

23 Hamel, 209–215.

24 Encyclopédie, Histoire, 110. My translation, 110.

25 Ibid., 200–21; al-Zayyāñī, Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812, 110.

26 Benfaida, 112.

27 La Veronne, 23, 28.

28 Pierre Loti, Au Maroc, ed. Calmann Lévy (Paris: Chaix, 1890). My translation. Accessed 26 February 2019, available at

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k106259k/f5.image#>

[29 Al-Zayyânî, Le Maroc de 1631 à 1812, 55.](#)

Appendix

1 Castries, Moulay Ismail et Jacques II, 56–99. My translation.

[2 Ibid., 59. I opted for an alternative translation here.](#)

[3 This laborious passage refers to several diplomatic exchanges between the courts of Charles II and Moulay Ismail, including the Moroccan embassies of Mohammad Ben Haddou \(1681–82\) and Abdallah Ben Aïsha \(1685\) and the English diplomatic missions of Henry Howard \(1672, 1675\) and Richard Kirke \(1683\). The agreements referred to by Moulay Ismail probably refer to truces negotiated over fighting around Tangiers. The most notable example here was the period after the siege of 1680, when both sides cease active combat operations until the English finally withdrew in 1684.](#)

[4 This passage refers to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius \(610–641 CE\). Around 629 CE, according to Muslim sources, Mohammad sent a messenger with his invitation to convert to Islam to Heraclius. The Greek emperor received the fellow with due courtesy, but he did not convert.](#)